

4TH CALL OIE ADVISORY GROUP ON COVID-19 AND ANIMALS

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Agenda

1. Update on COVID-19 virus 'events' in animals
2. Update on animal related research activities
3. Wildlife work and current investigations into the source
4. Update on considerations for animal health labs providing support to diagnostic testing
5. OIE expert group on trade risk assessment advisory group
6. AOB

Meeting notes

1. Update on COVID-19 virus 'events' in animals

Belgium provided an update on a cat testing positive for SARS-CoV-2. The cat had close contact with its owner who was positive for COVID-19. The cat was showing clinical signs (diarrhea, vomiting, anorexia, followed by coughing and superficial breathing). Consecutive vomit and stool samples from the cat tested positive (on RT-PCR and sequencing) for SARS-CoV-2. However, contamination of samples from the environment/owner cannot be ruled out because the samples were taken from the environment (and not directly from the animal) by the owner (who is not a technical expert). Therefore, although infection of the cat is suspected (proximity to infected owner, clinical information, RT-PCR results, studies suggesting potential susceptibility of cats to SARS-CoV-2 infection), productive infection cannot be confirmed. The cat will also be tested for antibodies to SARS-CoV-2.

Hong Kong: neither of the two dogs which were positive for SARS-CoV-2 showed clinical signs of COVID-19 infection.

It was highlighted that so far, positive findings in companion animals were 'isolated cases' associated with close contact with humans positive for SARS-CoV-2.

It was clarified that findings demonstrating the detection of SARS-CoV-2 virus in animals should be reported to the OIE. However, the results of experimental infections in high containment facilities would not meet this criterion.

Action: the group suggested developing criteria or a case definition for reporting COVID-19 events in animals to the OIE

Action: the group suggested developing guidance on when (under what conditions an animal should be tested) and how to sample/test companion animals for SARS-CoV-2 and on the action to be taken when animals test positive. This should include the justification for testing companion animals.

2. Update on animal related research activities

Animal infection studies are on-going in some high containment facilities with no results to report so far.

A WHO consultant has been working on a living document (updated weekly) on latest research findings for COVID-19. The team that curates this document at University of Leuven is actively looking for animal health experts to contribute to this document. It can be found at: https://rega.kuleuven.be/if/corona_covid-19

Action: for members of the group to contact Stefano Messori at the OIE if they are interested in coordinating animal health related research inputs to this document

In the USA, a research institute is planning on doing experimental infection studies in brown bats (which have a long range) to address the research question 'if humans introduce SARS-CoV-2 infections into brown bats, could they become a reservoir?'

3. Wildlife work and current investigations into the source

The OIE project 'EBO-SURSY' is proposing to test 3000 samples already collected from bats for haemorrhagic fever virus surveillance in West Africa for the presence of coronavirus to assess whether precursor viruses to SARS-CoV-2 have been circulating.

In China – animals from fur farms (including mink, foxes, raccoon dogs) have been tested for SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR. So far all have been negative.

Recommendation: it would be important to collect and communicate negative findings from animal surveillance for SARS-CoV-2.

In North America, huge investment (time and resources) has gone into captive breeding (with a view to reintroduction) of the endangered black-footed ferret. Infectious disease, including canine distemper, has already been a huge set back to the programme. The programme is already implementing strict biosecurity to avoid workers infecting the ferrets with SARS-CoV-2. This highlights the relevance of animal infection studies (of ferrets to conservation work).

Recommendation: the COVID-19 pandemic and research should also consider/contextualise potential impacts of COVID-19 on biodiversity and conservation programmes.

4. Update on considerations for animal health labs providing support to diagnostic testing

OIE has produced a high-level guidance document for veterinary laboratories on considerations for providing diagnostic support to the public health response to COVID-19. This guidance is available on the OIE website, on the same page as the Q&A. In several countries including Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain this is already happening on a large scale.

5. OIE expert group on trade risk assessment *ad hoc* Group

The inception of an OIE ad hoc Group on trade risk assessment was triggered by an increasing number of questions on trade risk related to animal products, food, feed and packaging. The Terms of Reference and

list of participants for this group are being developed. Several OIE Member Countries have already produced risk assessments. This work will be done in coordination with the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the IPCC.

6. AOB

On request from the OIE Director General, the informal advisory group on COVID-19 and animals will become an *ad hoc* Group.

The group congratulated OIE on the initiative to consistently hold these calls, as they find them very useful.