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## OIE REFERENCE LABORATORIES AND COLLABORATING CENTRES: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

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From its creation, the OIE has been determined that the information it provides, the decisions it takes and the standards it adopts should be founded on wholly objective criteria and scientifically valid evaluations. This fundamental requirement led the OIE to establish Specialist Commissions and Working Groups, bringing together world-leading experts. From the end of the 1980s, it became clear that to meet the growing demands and requirements of OIE Members in terms of animal health information and international standards, Specialist Commissions and Working Groups need be assisted by a network of expertise that could be called upon to provide advice and aid on technical and scientific matters, including the basis for the setting of international standards and as international points of reference for disease diagnosis and prevention.

In 1991, the Standards Commission circulated a questionnaire to Members asking for information about experts and reference laboratories for many of the diseases on the then OIE Lists A and B. Taking into consideration the responses, the Commission selected over 75 laboratories to be offered designation as an OIE Reference Laboratory and one for designation as an OIE Collaborating Centre.

In 1993, the official mandates and rules for OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres were formally adopted by the International Committee. Reference Laboratories are required to function as centres of expertise and standardisation for a named disease. Collaborating Centres are focused on cross-cutting topics rather than specific diseases, and they are not necessarily laboratory based (although many are).

The Standards Commission has developed guidelines for candidate institutions wishing to become designated as an OIE Reference Laboratory or Collaborating Centre. These require the institution to demonstrate a track record of scientific activities relevant to the selected disease or topic, including evidence of existing international activities.

To date, there are over 220 Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres in over 40 countries covering over 130 diseases or topics with nearly 200 experts. There are Reference Laboratories for nearly every OIE listed disease and certain general topics (e.g. antimicrobial resistance) and Collaborating Centres for a number of areas of expertise, including laboratory capacity building, training of official veterinarians, disease surveillance, food safety and animal welfare.

The OIE is committed to expanding and strengthening this network of expertise and to creating synergy so as to continue to meet the emerging challenges in a globalising world. It is imperative that all participating institutions in the network share a common vision and regularly communicate with each other in order to allow the OIE to fully carry out its mission entrusted by the international community. The network of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres has been and will be at the heart of scientific excellence and integrity of the OIE work.



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