



## **Veterinary medicinal products and vaccines: indispensable tools for any effective animal health and welfare policy**

**15/01/2010** Appropriate prevention and control of animal diseases depends first of all upon policies of good veterinary governance.

These policies must be underpinned by legislation inspired by OIE standards but they must also be backed up the necessary resources for its enforcement, in particular by the Veterinary Services supported by their public and private sector components working together in a clearly defined partnership. Among the many aspects of this partnership, one of the most important concerns conditions governing the use of veterinary products by private veterinarians and other animal health stakeholders.

It should be remembered that the control of threats to the health and welfare of animals such as bacteria, viruses, parasites and other pathogens cannot be achieved without the judicious use of drugs, vaccines and other veterinary products that act upon the health of animals, regardless of whether they are farmed, used for recreational purposes or kept as companion animals.

However, these important factors of health are not innocuous products. It is acknowledged worldwide that their use must be strictly supervised, for in the absence of public sector controls, the risks associated with their imprudent use may far exceed any potential benefit.

The control of veterinary products begins with legally adopted definitions of the various products used (vaccines, antibiotics, disinfectants, vitamins, antiparasitics, etc.) and the regulations governing their importation, or indeed their manufacture if they are produced within the country. This is why veterinary products have to be officially registered before they can receive marketing approval. To this end, the OIE works closely with VICH, which is the only international body that adopts and issues guidelines on technical requirements relating to the registration of veterinary medicinal products.

As soon as VICH guidelines have gained sufficient recognition by the international community, the OIE will in turn submit them to its Members for adoption as OIE standards. In the meantime, as a sign of OIE/VICH cooperation, the VICH General Assembly and the 4th VICH Global Conference will be held at the OIE Headquarters in Paris in June 2010.

Moreover, the OIE is already involved in the preparation of standards on diagnostic assays and their official validation, as well as on conditions governing the production of high quality veterinary vaccines. These standards are published in the OIE *Terrestrial Manual* and *Aquatic Manual* and updated annually by the World Assembly of national Delegates to the OIE.

In addition to national or regional registration of veterinary products, the conditions governing their distribution and use are also key factors in limiting the risks associated with their inappropriate use. The conditions governing the prudent use of antibiotics and certain antiparasitics are therefore one of the priority factors of the control procedures that need to be implemented.

All these control procedures may differ widely from one country to another, but the OIE wishes to draw its Members' attention to the following recommendations:

- the higher the level of risk that a product poses to animal health or public health, the greater the need to ensure that its users' professional qualifications are appropriate and their initial and continuing training suitably adapted so as to minimise this risk;
- the presence of a national veterinary network enabling surveillance of animal populations in all countries throughout their territory must be guaranteed by all governments to effectively detect and control diseases as soon as they occur, and in so doing prevent biological disasters. The revenue that private veterinarians receive from supplying products, especially in remote or inhospitable areas, provides them with an indispensable supplementary income, thereby helping to maintain the nationwide veterinary network needed in all countries of the world;
- lastly, the OIE places strong emphasis on the importance of keeping national legislation on veterinary products up to date. The Global Conference on Veterinary Legislation, due to take place in Djerba, Tunisia from 7 to 9 December 2010, will include detailed coverage of legislative issues relating to veterinary products.

The OIE has also recommended that each of its Members appoint a focal point to be responsible at the national level for relations with the OIE in the field of veterinary products. The OIE regularly invites these officials throughout the world to take part in training programmes to help them, with the support of its Collaborating Centres such as the one in Fougères (France), to obtain the appropriate international and technical information. The focal points of the 175 OIE Members thus form a worldwide network of experts that can help to bring about the harmonisation of policies in the field of veterinary products with the aim of improving national animal health policies.

It is now clear just how great an impact actions to promote animal health can have in helping to improve food security and food safety, reduce poverty and increase access to lucrative markets for animals and animal products. Yet, in most cases, actions in favour of animal health depend on the availability and appropriate use of good quality veterinary products.

It is also clear that the irresponsible use of veterinary products can have harmful consequences, not only for animal health but also for public health. That is why the Codex Alimentarius and its parent organisations, FAO and WHO, are key partners of the OIE in the field of recommendations for veterinarians and livestock producers, and in particular on conditions governing the use of veterinary products in animals for human consumption, risk analysis of residues of veterinary drugs in food products derived from animals and methods for the analysis of these residues.

All actions relating to these fields must be a constant concern on the part of the Veterinary Services of all countries of the world, with the permanent support of the OIE, which considers all these issues as one of its priorities.

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(1) According to the official OIE definition, the Veterinary Services include public and private sector components relating to mechanisms and stakeholders involved in animal disease prevention and control.

(2) International Cooperation on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Veterinary Medicinal Products.