



**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE OIE AD HOC GROUP
ON BIOLOGICAL THREAT REDUCTION IN RELATION TO SPECIFIC METHODOLOGIES
FOR VETERINARY SERVICES, PERTAINING TO THE INVESTIGATION
OF SUSPICIOUS BIOLOGICAL EVENTS¹**

Paris, 28 – 30 November 2017

The second meeting of the *ad hoc* Group on Biological Threat Reduction in Relation to Specific Methodologies for Veterinary Services, Pertaining to the Investigation of Suspicious Biological Events (hereafter the Group) was held at the OIE Headquarters from 28 to 30 November 2017.

1. Opening

The meeting was opened by the Chair of the *ad hoc* Group, Dr Gary Vroegindewey, who led the Group through a roundtable introduction.

On behalf of Dr Monique Eloit, Director General of the OIE, Dr Matthew Stone, the OIE Deputy Director General for International Standards and Science, welcomed and thanked the Group for its commitment and the extensive support towards the OIE mandate. Dr Stone provided context on the OIE methodology for expert groups and the steps that the Guidelines went through in the OIE process for endorsing recommendations since the last meeting. This address was followed by an introduction from the Head of OIE Programmes Department, Ms Tianna Brand, concerning the usefulness of the Guidelines for future activities such as workshops involving the animal health and law enforcement sectors.

2. Adoption of the agenda and Terms of Reference (ToR)

The agenda and terms of reference for the Group were reviewed and agreed on without modifications.

The terms of reference, agenda and the list of participants are provided as [Appendices I, II and III](#) respectively.

3. Discussion

3.1. Comments to the Guidelines

After the last meeting, the draft Guidelines were presented to the OIE Biological Standards and Scientific Commissions during their meetings, in September 2017. The Commissions commended the work done by the Group and showed interest in being updated on the evolution of the document.

3.2. Review of the Guidelines

During the morning of the first day, there was a preliminary review of the draft guidelines with the intention to find gaps and weaknesses to be addressed. Considerations for improvement of the Guidelines included reference to pertinent policy documents issued by other organizations and conventions and could help to broaden the impact of the Guidelines to different sectors, as well as the need to having each country using the guidelines as a complement to their national legislation. Also, it was deemed that the level of detail in the document should be adjusted, especially in what relates to the sections on laboratory work, for example: additional consideration should be given to biosecurity and biosafety in the

¹ Note: This *ad hoc* Group report reflects the views of its members and may not necessarily reflect the views of the OIE. This report should be read in conjunction with the February 2018 report of the Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases because this report provides its considerations and comments. It is available at: <http://www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/specialists-commissions-groups/scientific-commission-reports/meetings-reports/>

investigation of a suspicious event. Consideration should also be given to how to integrate biological threat reduction and investigation of suspicious events in the OIE Performance of Veterinary Services in terms of core/competencies for emergency management.

An example of a form to track the chain of custody will be attached to the Guidelines. A reference for this document is missing, as this should refer to an open source document that can be accessed by all people who wish to do so. Having a template form that can be adapted to each country's existing forms would be better suited. It was also highlighted that not only select agents are potential causes for a suspicious event; it could be caused by any agent. That being said, the scale of the event in terms of number of people and animals affected, environmental, economic and financial consequences will dictate whether this is an event of concern or not and whether these Guidelines are applicable. Hence, recommendations to the National Veterinary Services concerning surge response capability should also be considered.

3.3. Breakout Groups

The participants were divided in working groups to further develop assigned sections of the guidelines. Significant additions and changes were made to the contents of the document. Dr Alexander Hamilton, from UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), joined the Group for 30 minutes in the afternoon. After revision of the various sections, the Group was asked to try to find gaps in the document and to review related OIE documents that are useful references for the purposes of the Guidelines, namely OIE *Code* Chapter 3.3 on Communications and the OIE Day-One Competencies for Graduating Veterinarians.

3.4. Applicability in low resource environments

On the second day of the meeting, the Group started the discussion by talking over the challenges that National Veterinary Services from lower-resource countries would face while trying to implement these guidelines, due to lack of resources, insufficient training, shortage of staff, and difficulties related to ensuring sustainability of donor-funded projects, equipment and facilities.

3.5. Training requirements

The Group highlighted that in order for the Guidelines to be operational and to facilitate its implementation in Member Countries, the OIE would benefit from bringing together and training a group of experts who could not only take this subject from the veterinary arena into the public health and environmental fields, as well as to brief other organizations, National Veterinary Services and relevant stakeholders through 1-day training courses. Some of the target audiences would be OIE Focal Points (namely for Disease Notification and for Laboratories) and OIE Regional and Sub-Regional Representatives.

3.6. Considerations on the OIE Global Conferences on Biological Threat Reduction

The Group was updated on the outcomes of the 2nd OIE Global Conference on Biological Threat Reduction, held in Ottawa, Canada, from 31 October to 2 November 2017, including the presentation of a scientific poster on the draft Guidelines, previously approved by the Group. A set of recommendations was issued from the Conference; the Group was invited to provide comments on them. With regard to Recommendation 3, one of the Group members mentioned that it would be important to emphasise how communication and cooperation should be articulated, in order to guarantee that the "competition for publishing findings of scientific studies" does not translate into publishing information that may fall into the worrisome side of dual use.

Also, the Chair mentioned that it would be important to follow up on Recommendations 9 and 10, related to the incorporation of biothreat reduction in the joint activities of the Tripartite, the support in the implementation of the Bangkok Principles for the health aspects of the Sendai Framework, and the sustainable implementation of the International Health Regulations (WHO, 2005) and OIE Performance of Veterinary Services Pathway recommendations, respectively. As capacity for implementation of these activities and recommendations is poor in many countries, strategies tailored for each one must be applied.

It was discussed whether having a third edition of the OIE Global Conference on Biological Threat Reduction would be pertinent, and feedback from the Group members and their acquaintances who attended the conference was received.

Having in consideration that a great number of events and conferences pertaining to biological threat reduction has been taking place every year, the target audience for the OIE Conferences must be held in consideration when deliberating on this subject; the events organized by the OIE thus far were aimed at updating the OIE Network on a specific topic while bringing together relevant players from that field. Even though such events are not able to keep up with the forefront of scientific innovation, they are pertinent in terms of updating a specific audience on relevant advances and future directions on relevant fields.

That being said, the majority of the Group members agreed that a 3rd OIE Global Conference on Biological Threat Reduction would be of significant value in terms of increasing biothreat awareness, sharing information, and providing networking opportunities. However, it was recommended that the next conference should take place three to four years after the 2nd Global Conference.

3.7. Discussion with OIE management

On the morning of the last day of the meeting, Dr Matthew Stone and Ms Tianna Brand, Head of OIE Programmes Department, joined the meeting to receive a brief on the current status of development of the Guidelines, its scope, applicability and concerns related to the feasibility of their implementation. It was explained that the edits made to the Guidelines cut down long lists and focused on making the directions operational.

Dr Stone emphasized the importance of making it clear from the beginning that inter-sectoral cooperation built on the establishment of proactive institutional relationships is crucial for adequate preparedness, prevention, and eventual response to biological threats, and should be highlighted in the Guidelines. Also, Dr Stone mentioned that it would be important that the text gave clear direction in terms of communication, strategies for bringing parties together and releasing information to the public in the best way, as well as safeguarding the chain of custody throughout the investigation process. Even though these Guidelines are considered to be aspirational, giving the best directions we have to Member Countries is a priority. The OIE would be pleased to assist Member Countries reaching out for support in case they find struggles when trying to integrate the strategies given in their national plans of action.

Ms Tianna Brand, pointed out that reference to relevant OIE publications should be made whenever possible, as the OIE *Code*, OIE Manual and Guidelines for Disaster Risk Reduction are referenced where relevant for the purposes of the present Guidelines. Also, it was noted that the publication of the Guidelines will effectively implement some of the recommendations from the 1st Global Conference and with the momentum gained from the 2nd OIE Global Conference on Biological Threat Reduction, this presents an opportunity for these Guidelines to be referenced in upcoming workshops and trainings organized by the OIE.

3.8. Review of the Guidelines

In the afternoon of the third day, the Chair guided the Group for the final review of the document, having in consideration the additions made by the Group members during the previous afternoon and overnight.

4. Further work programme items identified by the *ad hoc* Group

As invited through the terms of reference, following the review of the Guidelines the Group took the opportunity to consider further work that could be undertaken to continue the progress made and support effective implementation of the guidelines.

4.1. For consideration by the OIE

- a) Incorporate biothreat preparedness, prevention and mitigation into the OIE Performance of the Veterinary Services Pathway

b) Communication:

- i) Develop model communications strategies, pre-scripted messages, templates for risk communications with consideration to release authorities

c) Training and education:

- i) Promote joint and inter-sectoral trainings/exercises
 - ii) Incorporation into OIE Day-One and Advanced Competencies
 - iii) Senior leadership training
 - iv) Online and hard copy training materials
 - v) Biothreat laboratory training
 - vi) Sampling for Biothreat
 - vii) Biothreat Reduction *guidelines training course - Laboratory and Disease Notification focal points*
- d) With regard to ToR 2 d), the Group recommends the OIE to develop guidelines for biothreat risk assessment to be used for appropriate agent decontamination, carcass disposition, environmental impact, personnel safety including training and education in these areas.
- e) OIE and appropriate partners to assess biothreat potential in the livestock food chain and wildlife
- f) OIE to establish a mechanism to assess the biothreat potential of notified incidents, in order to identify any international trend that may be an indicator of a deliberate coordinated event.
- g) Develop biothreat reduction and Disaster Risk Management Chapters for the OIE *Terrestrial Code*
- h) Continue the OIE Global Conferences on Biological Threat Reduction with a 3rd edition in 3 to 4 years' time
- i) OIE to gather a roster of speakers to present at international venues other than veterinary medical meetings on biothreat reduction and to liaise with relevant partners on this subject.

4.2. For consideration by OIE Member Countries

- a) Utilize these Guidelines to evaluate countries' biothreat reduction legal frameworks and capabilities.

5. Adoption of the draft report

The Group reviewed and amended the draft report provided by the rapporteur. The Group agreed that the report reflected the discussions.

.../Appendices

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Terms of Reference

Background

The OIE supports its Member Countries and helps them strengthen and improve the structure of their national animal health systems. The OIE also collects, analyses, and makes available the latest scientific information on prevention and control of animal diseases. This includes information on response to disease outbreaks.

The response to an outbreak will be the same, regardless of the origin, be it natural, accidental or deliberate. However, determining if the outbreak was of natural or deliberate origin requires a different mind-set and additional skills. In the event of a deliberate release of a pathogen it would then also become important to attribute the release to someone or to a Group, first and foremost to prevent further events but of course also to allow prosecution. Therefore, all parts of the investigation including analysis of evidence have to be done in a way that holds up in a court of law. To date there are no overarching recommendations for the identification and investigation of suspicious biological events related to animal health. In order to address this gap, also in line with recommendations from the first OIE Global Conference on Biological Threat Reduction in 2015, the OIE decided to convene an *ad hoc* Group in relation to Specific Methodologies for Veterinary Services, pertaining to the Investigation of Suspicious Biological Events.

I. Terms of Reference

The *ad hoc* Group will be asked to:

1. Review existing guidance documents which pertain to this topic, among these are the OIE Glossary, the EU CBRNE Glossary, Appendices III, IV, V, IV, V, VII, IX, and A of the United Nations General's Mechanism for the Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical or Biological Weapons, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Laboratory biosafety manual, WHO Guidance Document on Responsible Life Science Research for Global Health Security, the Laboratory Biorisk Management Standard of the European Commission for Standardization, the International Criminal Police Commission (INTERPOL) INTERPOL bioterrorism incident pre-planning & response guide, the Emergencies ToolKit published by Infection Prevention and Control Canada, the Criminal Investigation Handbook published by the Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department for Agriculture, the Joint Criminal and Epidemiological Investigations Handbook published by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as Chapters 1.1.1 to 1.1.7 of the *OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals*.
2. To develop a holistic and comprehensive methodology for Veterinary Services for the identification and investigation of suspicious biological events affecting terrestrial animals, which may include:
 - a) Criteria for the identification of suspicious biological events that warrant further investigation.
 - b) Defining technical differences or additional skills and capabilities required for investigating outbreaks that are proven or suspected to be of non-natural origin, including but not limited to: strategic consideration of leadership in such an investigation, responsibilities and liabilities; interview and observational skills.

- c) Defining criteria to positively distinguish between naturally occurring, accidentally or intentionally caused outbreaks, including identifying potential limitations.
- d) To develop recommendations for adapted risk assessment in order to account for potentially enhanced properties of weaponized or otherwise altered biological agents that could entail increased harm.
- e) To identify further issues that require in-depth review and propose, to the DG, the composition and terms of reference for Groups of experts convened specifically to study such issues, and if necessary, to participate in the work of these Groups.

II. Ground Rules

- Open Source Material ONLY
 - Chatham House Rule applies: Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.
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Agenda

1. Opening
2. Adoption of the agenda and Terms of Reference (ToR)
3. Discussion
 - 3.1. Comments to the Guidelines
 - 3.2. Review of the Guidelines
 - 3.3. Breakout Groups
 - 3.4. Applicability in low resource environments
 - 3.5. Training requirements
 - 3.6. Considerations on the OIE Global Conferences on Biological Threat Reduction
 - 3.7. Discussion with OIE management
 - 3.8. Review of the Guidelines
4. Further work programme items identified by the *ad hoc* Group
 - 4.1. For consideration by the OIE
 - 4.2. For consideration by OIE Member Countries
5. Adoption of the draft report

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