



AD HOC GROUP ON COVID-19 AND SAFE TRADE IN ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

First meeting, Paris, 9 April 2020

The meeting of the OIE *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and Safe trade in Animals and Animal products (hereafter referred to as the Group) was held as a video conference on 9 April 2020.

1. Opening

Dr Matthew Stone, Deputy Director General of the OIE for International Standards and Science, welcomed the participants of the Group on behalf of Dr Monique Eloit, Director General of the OIE.

Dr Stone gave an overview of the OIE's COVID-19 Incident Management Approach and briefly described its OIE Science and Intelligence workstream components, which include this Group as well as the *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and the HumanAnimal Interface and the Advisory Group for Veterinary Laboratory Support to the Public Health Response to COVID-19. To ensure good coordination and communication between the different expert Groups, this Group shares two members with the *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and the Human-Animal- Interface.

Dr Stone noted that the purpose of this Group is to monitor current scientific knowledge and relevant risk assessments developed by stakeholders on the risks to human health and animal health (if any) associated with COVID-19 and international trade in animals and animal products. The Group will also work to ensure the consistency and basis for evidence of messages and advice provided by the OIE and, where relevant, CODEX and IPPC.

2. Chairperson and rapporteur

The meeting was chaired by Dr Cristóbal Zepeda, President of the Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases of the OIE. Secretariat support was provided by OIE staff members.

The Terms of Reference (ToRs), the agenda, and the list of participants, are provided in Appendices I, II, and III, respectively.

3. National risk assessments

The meeting began with an overview of existing national risk assessments (RAs) carried out by the Agence Nationale de Sécurité Sanitaire de l'Alimentation, de l'Environnement et du Travail (ANSES¹, France), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA², UK), and the Agence Fédérale pour la Sécurité de la Chaîne Alimentaire (AFSCA³, Belgium).

Dr Sophie Le Poder provided an overview of the RA performed by ANSES, which addressed the potential role of pets and livestock in the spread of SARS-CoV-2 to humans, and the risk of human infection through contaminated cooked or uncooked food. Dr Helen Roberts explained that DEFRA is working on several RAs, not all of which may be released to the general public. She provided an overview of two RAs, one focusing on the risk of pets exposed to infected humans and the subsequent risk of onward spread of infection from pets to humans and other animals, and the other on the risks of livestock exposure to the virus from infected humans.

¹ <https://www.anses.fr/fr/system/files/SABA2020SA0037-1EN.pdf>

² Not publicly available.

³ http://www.afsca.be/comitescientifique/avis/2020/ documents/Conseilurgentprovisoire04-2020_SciCom2020-07_Covid-19petitsanimauxdomestiques_27-03-20_001.pdf

Dr Roberts also noted that the issue of potential contamination of meat imported from infected countries had been considered. Dr Cristóbal Zepeda summarised the RA performed by AFSCA, which was focused on the risk of transmission from infected humans to cats and dogs, and from infected cats or dogs to humans.

The Group noted that the ANSES opinion on the safety of cooked food was based on heat inactivation data for other viruses in the *Coronaviridae* family, as there was no available data on the thermal inactivation of SARS-CoV-2 virus. However, coronaviruses are readily inactivated at temperatures used when preparing hot food in catering (e.g. within four minutes at 63°C).

The ability of SARS-CoV-2 to infect animals was discussed by the Group. It was noted that the presence of a suitable receptor in a new host is necessary but not sufficient to result in infection. For example, of all species examined to date, pigs have a receptor that most closely matches that of humans, yet they are not susceptible. Further, ability of a species to be infected does not necessarily result in viral replication and viraemia and the ability to then infect other animals. To date, livestock species including pigs, chickens and ducks appear resistant to infection. In contrast, cats are susceptible to infection under laboratory conditions, and young cats may show severe clinical signs. Further, evidence is accumulating that there may be natural infection occurring in stray cats and in cats in shelters or exhibits. Animal challenge studies demonstrate that ferrets are also susceptible to infection, which is relevant as they are kept as companion animals and are used in medical research, presumably constituting a suitable model (for example, for vaccine efficacy studies).

The Group commented on the difficulty of extrapolating susceptibility information derived from animal challenge studies conducted under laboratory conditions to external, 'real-world' situations. In experimental settings, the viral challenge dose tends to be very high.

The potential for companion animals to mechanically transfer SARS-CoV-2 from their fur to susceptible humans was noted, but there is no data yet on the longevity of the virus on fur. To date, there is no evidence of transmission from companion animals to humans.

The Group concluded that:

- companion animals or livestock in contact with COVID-19 human cases have a high risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2
- the role of companion animals in the current epidemiology of COVID-19 in humans is negligible
- there is no evidence from either risk assessments or experimental studies to indicate that food-producing animals play any role in the COVID-19 pandemic
- the predominant risk pathway for exposure of susceptible humans to SARS-CoV-2 is by direct or indirect contact with infected humans.

4. Knowledge gaps and uncertainties

The Group noted:

- that information is lacking concerning the pathogenesis of infection in animal hosts, including which tissues might contain virus considering the limited and transient viraemia, if any
- the difficulty of extrapolating laboratory findings to field conditions
- the lack of information on susceptibility of other livestock species, including cattle, sheep, goats and aquatic animals
- that quantification of the amount and duration of viral shedding by infected cats and ferrets would be useful
- that data is lacking on the longevity of SARS-CoV-2 on the fur of animals
- that information about risk factors for susceptibility to infection (e.g. age, stress, other health conditions) in non-human species would be useful.

5. Intelligence gathering – other relevant research

The Group was informed that FAO is preparing a RA on SARS-CoV-2 exposure from animals or their products, focusing on wildlife, livestock, pets, and aquatic animals. The RA is currently under finalisation by FAO technical staff and should be released by mid-May. Members of the Group may be contacted for technical review.

Animal challenge studies continue. Cattle are included in at least one study.

6. OIE's Q&A – additions or modifications?

Based on the information and evidence considered in this meeting, the Group reviewed the latest version of the *Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)* published on the OIE website (last updated: 9/04/2020).

The Group recognised the important role of this document in keeping OIE Members informed, and commended the work of the OIE Secretariat and the experts who developed the current text. The Group considered that the text was consistent with current evidence, and suggested minor amendments to the current text to improve the clarity of some recommendations, primarily with respect to the lack of evidence supporting the implementation of sanitary measures to international trade of animals, including movements of pets.

7. Next meeting

The Group agreed to meet again on an as-needed basis.

8. Finalisation and adoption of the draft report

The Group finalised and adopted the draft report.

.../Appendices

AD HOC GROUP ON COVID-19 AND SAFE TRADE IN ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Terms of reference

Purpose

The purpose of this *ad hoc* Group is to monitor current scientific knowledge and relevant risk assessments developed by stakeholders on the risks to human health and animal health (if any) associated with COVID-19 and international trade in animals and animal products. The Group will also work to ensure the consistency and accuracy of messages and advice provided by the OIE and, where relevant, CODEX and IPPC.

Ad hoc Groups are convened under the authority of, and report to, the OIE Director General.

Background

In December 2019, human cases of pneumonia of unknown origin were reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China (People's Rep. of). A new Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was identified as the causative agent by Chinese Authorities. Since then, human cases have been reported by most countries around the world and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) event has been declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a pandemic.

The role of animals in the epidemiology of COVID-19 is unclear. The virus may have emerged from bats, but this is not yet certain. On 28 February 2020, a case of an asymptomatic pet dog apparently infected by its owner (a COVID-19 patient) in Hong Kong was reported to the OIE as an emerging disease. Subsequently, there have been reports of infection in other dogs and, more recently, in cats. In addition, animal challenge research has begun in multiple locations around the world, in a variety of species including some livestock as well as dogs and cats.

In the context of COVID-19, the question of whether international trade in animals or animal products may pose a risk to the health of humans or animals must be considered by countries as they attempt to balance the protection of human health against maintenance of the food supply chain. It is important that trade-related decisions are fully informed by science, are no more restrictive than is necessary to provide adequate protection, and consider other strategic imperatives such as food security.

Actions to deliver

This *ad hoc* Group will:

- **monitor** new knowledge related to SARS-CoV-2 that may affect risks to human health or animal health associated with international trade in animals or animal products
- **monitor** risk assessments for animals and animal products regarding SARS-CoV-2 infection
- **recommend** if risk mitigation measures for trade may be justified while balancing science-based risk with other considerations.

Considerations

- Consider the work and progress made by the *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and the human-animal interface.
- Consider the updated information and all relevant material provided by a Member or shared by the OIE in preparation of these meetings.
- Ensure a coordinated approach with Codex, and IPPC when relevant, to identify and address potential gaps in the advice provided by these organisations.

Expectations

Ad hoc Group members should:

- sign the OIE Undertaking on Confidentiality of information (if not done already)
- complete the Declaration of Interest Form
- read and study in detail all materials provided by the OIE prior to the meeting
- agree on the appointment of the chair of the meeting
- contribute to online and offline discussions
- contribute to drafting any advice
- understand that the membership of this group may be revised between *ad hoc* group meetings to reflect changing needs and priorities (for example, if additional risk management expertise becomes necessary).

Deliverables

The deliverables of this *ad hoc* Group include:

- text, as appropriate, to add to OIE's Q&A on COVID-19
- reviews or evaluations, as requested, on risk assessments produced by stakeholders
- a report that captures the main discussion points and conclusions of the meeting/s.

Timeline

The *ad hoc* Group will meet online on Thursday 9 April 2020, and afterwards on an *ad hoc* basis in response to emerging information.

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Paris, Thursday, 9 April 2020

Agenda

Start	End	Time	Item	Presenter
3:00 PM	3:10 PM	0:10	1. Welcome and brief introductions	Cristóbal ZEPEDA
3:10 PM	3:25 PM	0:15	2. <i>ad hoc</i> Group Terms of Reference and OIE context	Matthew STONE
3:25 PM	3:35 PM	0:10	3.a. Overview of existing risk assessments – French	Sophie LE PODER
3:35 PM	3:45 PM	0:10	3.b. Overview of existing risk assessments – UK	Helen ROBERTS
3:45 PM	3:55 PM	0:10	3.c. Overview of existing risk assessments – Belgian, others?	Cristóbal ZEPEDA
3:55 PM	4:05 PM	0:10	4.a. Intelligence gathering – risk assessments	Cristóbal ZEPEDA
4:05 PM	4:10 PM	0:05	4.b. Intelligence gathering – other relevant research	Cristóbal ZEPEDA
4:10 PM	4:15 PM	0:05	5. OIE's Q&A – additions or modifications?	Cristóbal ZEPEDA
4:15 PM	4:20 PM	0:05	6. Next steps and way forward	Cristóbal ZEPEDA

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