

The OIE standards

The purpose of the OIE's international standards is to improve the health and welfare of animals throughout the world, regardless of socio-economic, religious or cultural context. Based on the most recent scientific and technical knowledge, they are aimed at improving the prevention and control of animal diseases, including those transmissible to humans (zoonoses), and to improve animal welfare worldwide; in particular, by establishing high-quality national Veterinary Services. They also constitute the animal health standards of reference recognised by the World Trade Organization (WTO), to ensure health safety in the international trade of animals and their products. These intergovernmental standards are revised and adopted each year by the 180 Member Countries of the OIE and published in the OIE *Codes* and *Manuals*.

KEY POINTS

- The OIE standards are aimed at improving the health and welfare of animals throughout the world.
- They are recognised by the WTO as the international reference standards for animal health, including zoonoses (diseases transmissible to humans).
- They are developed by the world's top scientific experts and adopted by the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE.

THE ISSUES COVERED

On becoming Members of the OIE, countries commit themselves to integrate the OIE intergovernmental standards into their national legislation and regulations, enabling the implementation of measures required for effective surveillance, early detection, transparent notification and a rapid response in the event of disease outbreaks among terrestrial or aquatic animals, including zoonoses. Some standards are designed for use by Veterinary Authorities or other Competent Authorities of importing and exporting countries to avoid the transfer of pathogenic agents which affect animals or humans, while avoiding unjustified sanitary trade barriers. Other standards address the quality of Veterinary Services, animal welfare, and diagnostic methods or the quality of vaccines.

STANDARDS RECOGNISED ALL OVER THE WORLD

Since 1995, the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement) has recognised the OIE as the Reference Organisation for standards related to animal health and zoonoses.

This agreement is fundamental for the sanitary safety of the international trade in animals and animal products and the harmonisation of animal health provisions across the globe. As the World Organisation for Animal Health, the OIE is the only international organisation with the authority to develop international standards in the area of animal health, including zoonoses.

International and inter-agency cooperation

The OIE collaborates closely with other international organisations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the WTO; in particular, the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee).

These collaborations are essential to harmonise intergovernmental policy on standards at the global level.

PUBLICATION OF THE STANDARDS



The Codes

The *Terrestrial Code* and the *Aquatic Code* contain standards for implementing measures for the early detection, declaration within the country, notification and control of pathogenic agents, including zoonotic agents, in terrestrial animals (mammals, birds and bees) and aquatic animals (amphibians, fish, crustaceans and molluscs), and to avoid their spread through international trade in animals and animal products, while also avoiding the imposition of unjustified sanitary barriers to trade.



The Manuals

The role of the *Terrestrial* and *Aquatic Manuals* is to ensure the international harmonisation of laboratory techniques employed for the principal animal diseases. The standards published in the *Manuals* cover biological diagnostic tests and the production and control of biological products for veterinary usage (mainly vaccines), which enable the dissemination of internationally recognised techniques.

STANDARDS BASED ON SCIENCE AND TRANSPARENCY

To promote consensus, and the widest possible global application, independent of political, economic, cultural or religious context, OIE standards are based on the most compelling and undisputed scientific knowledge. The OIE has a strict policy of using only independent experts and transparent scientific advice.

For this reason, all documents from the Specialist Commissions of the OIE are published on its public website, and include as appendices the reports from the OIE Working Groups and expert groups which informed the Commissions' findings. When publishing these documents, the OIE invites comments from all its Member Countries, as well as from partner organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and concerned parties. Delegates from the Member Countries Delegates are encouraged to consult with the scientific community and private-sector stakeholders in their country to inform their comments.

In parallel, the OIE has in place a legal procedure to protect the confidentiality of the information provided to every expert or collaborator who works for the OIE, as well as a procedure for declaring potential conflicts of interest that OIE experts or staff could have with other entities.

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THE STANDARD-SETTING PROCEDURE

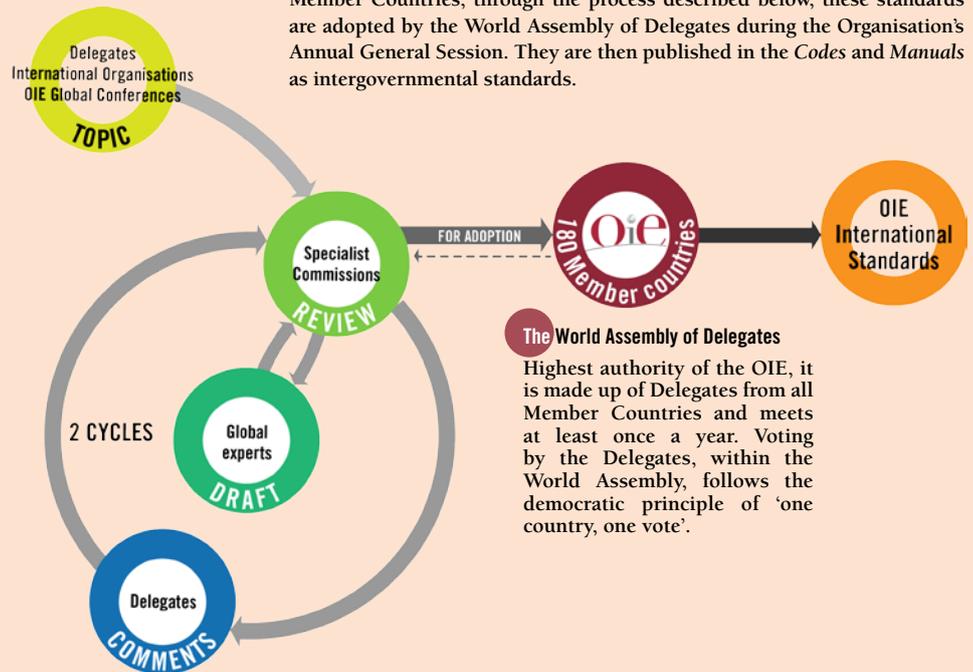
Specialist Commissions

Their mission is to review and analyse the most recent scientific information to, among other things, analyse the epidemiology and challenges involved in the prevention of animal diseases, to develop or revise the OIE standards and to address technical or scientific issues raised by Member Countries. There are four Specialist Commissions:

- The Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission
- The Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases
- The Biological Standards Commission
- The Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission

Groups of experts

The role of these working groups is to regularly review advances being made in their area of expertise and to keep OIE Member Countries informed of current issues through reports, scientific meetings and training sessions. Their work informs that of the Specialist Commissions. There are three permanent groups (Wildlife, Animal Welfare and Animal Production Food Safety), and several Ad hoc Groups brought together to deal with current issues (convened groups in 2015: African swine fever, foot and mouth disease and antimicrobial resistance).



OIE standards are developed at the request of Member Countries by internationally recognised experts from all regions of the world. Expert meetings are convened by the Director General of the OIE. The updating or adoption of a standard follows a very flexible and rigorous process, which allows texts to be revised regularly in accordance with new scientific information or epidemiological data. After consultation with experts and Member Countries, through the process described below, these standards are adopted by the World Assembly of Delegates during the Organisation's Annual General Session. They are then published in the *Codes* and *Manuals* as intergovernmental standards.

SOLIDARITY TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION OF THE STANDARDS

The OIE offers its expertise to the poorest countries to help them to control animal diseases which cause livestock losses, endanger public health and threaten other countries. Effective Veterinary Services are crucial to ensure the surveillance, detection and notification of animal disease outbreaks. Their resources, technical capacity and relationships with all the concerned parties must be adequate for this purpose. In this context, the OIE actively contributes towards helping countries to evaluate and improve their Veterinary Services' compliance with OIE standards on the quality and evaluation of Veterinary Services. The OIE has developed a tool called the Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Pathway for this purpose.

The OIE has also developed other methods to assist Member Countries to improve the implementation of standards at the national level, for example, through twinning programmes between laboratories, veterinary education establishments or Veterinary Statutory Bodies, as well as many other activities to strengthen national veterinary competencies.

Funds dedicated to capacity-building and compliance with OIE standards

As part of its commitment to produce international standards to ensure the quality of governance of Veterinary Services and to assist its Member Countries to apply these standards, the OIE has, since 2004, financed global public good projects related to the control of animal diseases, particularly zoonoses, through its World Animal Health and Welfare Fund.

In this respect, the evaluation of Veterinary Services by the PVS tool, coordinated by OIE Headquarters with the support of its Regional Representations and Offices on five continents, plays a crucial role in the preparation and definition of the national investments required for the prevention and control of animal diseases at the global level..

For more information on this topic

- [Web portal on the intergovernmental standards of the OIE](#)
- [Agreement between the World Trade Organization \(WTO\) and the World Organisation for Animal Health \(OIE\) adopted by WTO and the OIE on 4 May 1998](#)
- [Terrestrial Animal Health Code](#)
- [Aquatic Animal Health Code](#)
- [Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals](#)
- [Manual of diagnostic tests for aquatic animals](#)