

**Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

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**SANITARY ISSUES ARISING FROM THE NOVEL A/H1N1 INFLUENZA SITUATION**

45<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the SPS Committee

Communication by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)

The following communication, received on 8 June 2009, is being circulated at the request of the OIE.

1. Since authorities became aware of the emergence of a novel influenza virus (A/H1N1) in April 2009 the OIE in collaboration with the WTO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has published several statements on the animal health, food safety and international trade implications of the evolving situation. Copies of all OIE statements may be found on the OIE website: [http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en\\_press2009.htm?e1d3](http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_press2009.htm?e1d3) (see Annexes 1-8).

2. Some of the key messages conveyed through these statements include the following:

**I. SAFETY OF PIG MEAT AND PIG MEAT PRODUCTS FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION**

3. In statements issued jointly with WTO/FAO/WHO, the OIE highlighted that pork and pork products handled in accordance with good hygienic practices would not be a source of A/H1N1 infection.

**II. SAFETY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

4. To date, only one country has reported the presence of A/H1N1 virus in pigs and current evidence indicates that the spread of the virus is from human to human, not from animal (pig) to human. The OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* does not recommend the imposition of trade measures on the importation of pigs or their products as a means to prevent the spread of A/H1N1 virus and Members notifying such measures to the SPS Committee should be aware that these are not based on OIE standards.

**III. CULLING PIGS TO PROTECT AGAINST A/H1N1 VIRUS**

5. The OIE counsels strongly against the culling of pigs as such action would not help to guard against public or animal health risks. Under any circumstances, the culling for sanitary purposes of pigs and other animals should be done humanely in accordance with OIE standards.

6. At its 77<sup>th</sup> General Session the OIE provided an update on the current situation with the novel A/H1N1 virus. Members endorsed the actions of the OIE, notably the OIE's stance on the correct denomination of the new virus, on the implementation by some countries of unjustified import restrictions and on the need to respect the OIE international animal welfare standards when culling animals.

7. The International Committee also supported the OIE's collaboration with partners in regard to global epidemio-surveillance and scientific research, including through the OFFLU network.

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Annex 1**A/H1N1 INFLUENZA LIKE HUMAN ILLNESS IN MEXICO AND THE USA:  
OIE STATEMENT**

1. Paris, 27 April 2009 - A virus circulating in Mexico and the United States and involving person to person transmission appears to cause in some cases severe disease in certain people infected by this virus. There is no evidence that this virus is transmitted by food.
2. It is not a classical human influenza virus called seasonal influenza, which causes every year millions of human cases of influenza worldwide but a virus which includes in its characteristics swine, avian and human virus components.
3. No current information in influenza like animal disease in Mexico or the United States could support a link between human cases and possible animal cases including swine. The virus has not been isolated in animals to date. Therefore, it is not justified to name this disease swine influenza. In the past, many human influenza epidemics with animal origin have been named using geographic name, e.g. Spanish influenza or Asiatic influenza, thus it would be logical to call this disease "North-American influenza".
4. Urgent scientific research must be started in order to know the susceptibility of animals to this new virus, and if relevant to implement biosecurity measures including possible vaccination to protect susceptible animals. If this virus would be shown to cause disease in animals, virus circulation could worsen the regional and global situation for public health.
5. Currently, only findings related to the circulation of this virus in pigs in zones of countries having human cases would justify trade measures on the importation of pigs from these countries. The OIE will continue its alert function and will publish in relation with its Members, Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres all appropriate information in real time.
6. OIE and FAO underline the great value of the influenza veterinary laboratory network called OFFLU, in charge of the surveillance of the evolution of influenza viruses in animals. There is a strong need to reinforce this network whose members are urged to put immediately in the public domain any genetic sequence of influenza virus they obtain.
7. This influenza event underlines in all countries the crucial importance of maintaining worldwide veterinary services able to implement in animals early detection of relevant emerging pathogens with a potential public health impact. This capacity is fully linked with veterinary services good governance and their compliance with OIE international standards of quality.

April 2009

**OIE POSITION ON SAFETY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF PIGS  
AND PRODUCTS OF PIG ORIGIN**

1. Paris, 28 April 2009 - Because the current A/H1N1 related human health event has been described as swine influenza, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) wishes to further clarify the facts from the animal health perspective, particularly in relation to international trade of pigs and of products of pig origin. The OIE also points out that it will continue to respond to new, incoming information as the situation evolves.
2. Information available to the OIE does not indicate, at this time, that the influenza outbreak currently occurring in the United States and Mexico was preceded by an outbreak of swine influenza.
3. Within a few days, scientific investigations that are currently under way should indicate if the virus circulating in humans is capable of infecting animal species, such as pigs, chickens and horses.
4. It is not correct to call the current disease "swine influenza". The virus that is circulating includes genetic components of human, avian and swine origin. The OIE proposed to refer to this new virus as "North American influenza", using the same approach to nomenclature as used with the Asian influenza and Spanish influenza outbreaks that have occurred in the past.
5. Given there is no case of infection in animals confirmed in the zones where cases of human infection have been detected, it is not necessary to introduce specific measures for international trade in swine or their products nor to consider that consumers of pork products are at risk of infection.
6. The following update, sent to the National Delegates of the OIE's 174 Member Countries and Territories, summarises the OIE position regarding the safety of international trade in the context of the current influenza situation.

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**NOTE SENT TODAY TO THE OIE NATIONAL DELEGATES  
FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL**

1. I am writing to inform you about the current situation with A/H1N1 influenza-like human illness in Mexico and the United States. The OIE is of the view that as this virus has not, for the moment, been isolated in pigs or other animals, it is not appropriate to call it "swine influenza". The OIE recommends that the virus be referred to as "North American influenza", in keeping with the naming of other outbreaks of influenza in the human population. Nonetheless, this emerging disease is genetically linked, amongst others, with H1N1 swine influenza and the OIE is calling for scientific research to be started with urgency to assist in clarifying the sources and the risks presented by this virus to veterinary public health and to the different animal species (pigs, poultry and horses).
2. Notwithstanding that this human disease is not simply swine influenza, you would be aware that swine influenza is not an OIE listed disease and there is currently no justification in the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Code* for the imposition of trade measures on the importation of pigs or their products. To date there is no evidence that the virus is transmitted by food and influenza A viruses are generally not heat resistant.
3. In the event that the virus associated with the current human disease is shown to be circulating in animals in zones of countries that have reported human cases of infection, this should be

reported to the OIE as an emerging disease. If appropriate, the OIE will develop official recommendations to prevent and control any identified risks to public health and animal health from livestock production and trade.

4. Please note that an importing country has the right at any time to contact an exporting country and to conduct an inspection or audit of the situation as relevant to the importation of animals or animal products (Section 5. Trade measures, import/export procedures and veterinary certification).

5. Please see, for information, my public statement on this issue, which may be viewed at: [http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en\\_090427.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_090427.htm).

Bernard Vallat

April 2009

### **THE OIE STRONGLY COUNSELS AGAINST THE CULLING OF PIGS**

1. The OIE strongly counsels against the culling of pigs in the current situation with A/H1N1 influenza that started in North America.
2. Scientific information currently available to the OIE and partner organizations indicates that this novel A/H1N1 influenza virus is being transmitted amongst humans; there is no evidence of infection in pigs, nor of humans acquiring infection directly from pigs.
3. Moreover, and despite the fact that the currently circulating A/H1N1 influenza virus is not simply a swine influenza virus (it has reassortant genetic material of human, avian and swine origin), it is important to note that swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating pig meat or other products derived from pigs.
4. The OIE advises Members that the culling of pigs will not help to guard against public or animal health risks presented by this novel A/H1N1 influenza virus and such action is inappropriate. Instead, Members should focus their efforts on appropriate disease surveillance and strengthening the general biosecurity measures applied at premises where pigs are handled and slaughtered.
5. The OIE is collaborating with its network of reference laboratories and collaborating centres, as well as with the World Health Organization and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in scientific investigations on the current situation and will if needed issue further advice regarding biosecurity and trade measures in due course. Thanks to these current investigations, the pathogenicity (if any) of the circulating virus for animals should be known shortly and, once known, will be the subject of a further communication from the OIE.
6. In the meantime, Veterinary Authorities should work in collaboration with human health counterparts to monitor pig herds for any signs of unusual illness with suspected linkages to human cases of A/H1N1 influenza.

April 2009

Annex 4

**JOINT WTO/OIE/WHO/FAO STATEMENT ON A/H1N1 INFLUENZA**

1. Four global organizations stated on 2 May 2009 that pork products handled in accordance with hygienic practices are not a source of infection.
2. The following statement was issued jointly on 2 May 2009 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization.
3. In light of the spread of influenza A/H1N1, and the rising concerns about the possibility of this virus being found in pigs and the safety of pork and pork products, we stress that pork and pork products, handled in accordance with good hygienic practices recommended by the WHO, FAO, Codex Alimentarius Commission and the OIE, will not be a source of infection.
4. To date there is no evidence that the virus is transmitted by food. There is currently therefore no justification in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Code for the imposition of trade measures on the importation of pigs or their products.
5. However it is important that Veterinary Authorities should collaborate with human health counterparts to monitor pig herds for any signs of unusual illness with suspected linkages to human cases of A/H1N1 influenza.

**OIE COMMENTS ON THE FINDINGS OF "A/H1N1" IN PIGS IN CANADA**

1. Paris, 4 May 2009 – The Veterinary Services of Canada announced on Saturday, 2 May 2009 that a pig farm in Alberta, Canada had been infected with the "A/H1N1 virus". The infection is probably linked with the entry of a carpenter having worked at the farm. The carpenter had flu symptoms after a short stay in Mexico. He has now recovered. More investigations are still ongoing.
2. Some pigs at the farm went off feed and showed respiratory symptoms. The Canadian Veterinary Services decided immediately to put the farm under quarantine. The sampled pigs tested positive to the "A/H1N1 virus". It was a mild disease and the pigs have now recovered.
3. According to OIE regulations this event has the status of emerging disease and Canada is preparing an official notification to the OIE.
4. Because of the exceptional nature of this event and in order to make appropriate additional scientific investigations, the Canadian authorities may decide to maintain the farm under quarantine.
5. Furthermore, the OIE is waiting for the results of scientific experiments aimed to determine the susceptibility of different animal species vs the "A/H1N1" isolated in infected humans. This information is awaited within the following days and will be published as soon as available.
6. All previous recommendations made by the OIE before this event in pigs in Canada remain valid, including the implementation by Veterinary Services of biosecurity measures to protect animals from human infections as well as strengthening relevant animal surveillance.

Annex 6**OIE REACTION TO TRADE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED FOLLOWING TRANSMISSION OF VIRUS "A/H1N1" FROM HUMAN TO PIGS**

1. Paris, 7 May 2009 – Several countries around the world have imposed trade restrictions on countries exporting animals or products of animal origin that have declared human cases related to the new influenza of the type known as "A/H1N1".
2. The imposition of ban measures related to the import of pigs and pig products do not comply with international standards published by the OIE and all other competent standard setting international bodies for animal health and food safety.
3. The first transmission of "A/H1N1" virus from human to pigs in a single herd was officially notified to the OIE by Canada on the 5 May 2009 ([http://www.oie.int/wahis/reports/en\\_imm\\_0000008065\\_20090505\\_191855.pdf](http://www.oie.int/wahis/reports/en_imm_0000008065_20090505_191855.pdf)), based on provisions relating to emerging diseases contained in the OIE Code. The virus in question is the novel influenza virus "A/H1N1"; in contrast, the disease linked with the "classical" swine influenza virus is different and is not notifiable to the OIE since it is mild in pigs and the infection only rarely seriously affects humans.
4. The OIE will develop appropriate standards for this emerging disease. In the meantime, and until new standards have been adopted by its 174 Member Countries and Territories, the OIE recommends that all animals from the currently infected Canadian farm be maintained in strict isolation, and that quarantine from the farm not be lifted until it has been rigorously demonstrated by the Veterinary Services of the country concerned that there are no pigs infected with the "A/H1N1" virus at the farm. This recommendation would also apply to any other country that should experience a similar situation.
5. The OIE confirms and reiterates its recommendations already published jointly with WHO, FAO and the WTO on the 2 May 2009 regarding the safety of pork and pork products.
6. The OIE also issues a reminder that in all countries of the world the Veterinary Services are responsible for ensuring that no sick animal, regardless of the disease, is slaughtered for human consumption.

**JOINT FAO/WHO/OIE STATEMENT ON INFLUENZA A/H1N1  
AND THE SAFETY OF PORK**

1. Paris, 7 May 2009 - To avoid any misunderstanding FAO, WHO and OIE would like to reissue their joint statement originally issued on 30 April.
2. In the ongoing spread of influenza A(H1N1), concerns about the possibility of this virus being found in pigs and the safety of pork and pork products have been raised.
3. Influenza viruses are not known to be transmissible to people through eating processed pork or other food products derived from pigs.
4. Heat treatments commonly used in cooking meat (e.g. 70°C/160°F core temperature) will readily inactivate any viruses potentially present in raw meat products.
5. Pork and pork products, handled in accordance with good hygienic practices recommended by the WHO, Codex Alimentarius Commission and the OIE, will not be a source of infection.
6. Authorities and consumers should ensure that meat from sick pigs or pigs found dead are not processed or used for human consumption under any circumstances.

Annex 8**THE OIE ADVOCATES IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR  
HUMANE KILLING OF ANIMALS FOR DISEASE PREVENTION PURPOSES**

1. Paris, 20 May 2009 - The OIE already strongly advised on the pointless culling of pigs in relation with the recent outbreaks of novel A/H1N1 influenza. In its official statement issued on the 30 April 2009, the OIE advised its Members that the culling of pigs will not help to guard against public or animal health risks presented by this novel A/H1N1 influenza virus and that such action is not recommended.

2. However, some countries have decided to implement massive pig culling operations in this context, on the basis of the precaution principle. The OIE recalls that culling of animals should always be carried out in accordance with OIE international standards on killing methods for disease control purposes (Volume 1; Section 7; Chapter 7.6 of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*: [http://www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en\\_chapitre\\_1.7.6.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en_chapitre_1.7.6.htm)).

3. The Second OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare, held in Cairo, Egypt in October 2008 rallied support from all OIE Members and partners for worldwide implementation of OIE animal welfare standards. The OIE strongly encourages the effective implementation of these standards by all Members and offers its assistance to any Member wishing to implement culling operations in compliance with OIE standards.

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