



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

CALL FOR INTEREST on designation as FAO Reference Centre for Zoonotic Coronaviruses

One of the functions of FAO is to provide field and technical support to its Members to prevent or control major animal diseases. In order to provide evidence based, science driven support to countries, FAO utilizes institutions that bring their specialist academic, research, laboratory support to address the needs of Members and FAO.

The Reference Centres designated by FAO are ones that are widely regarded as centres of excellence in providing scientific and technical expertise, diagnostic services, laboratory and field training, in coordinating research and developmental studies, in their specialist fields.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals and humans, such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a global health crisis, FAO is in the front line of addressing and tackling emerging infectious diseases at the animal-human-environment interface and is playing a role in assessing and responding to its potential impacts on people's life and livelihoods, veterinary public health and occupational safety, global food trade, markets, food supply chains and animal health.

FAO is seeking suitable institutions that are interested in being designated as Reference Centres for Zoonotic Coronaviruses to support FAO and its Members in characterization of zoonotic coronaviruses and other emerging viruses with zoonotic potential.

The FAO Reference Centres for Zoonotic Coronaviruses are expected to provide support and expertise in one or more of the areas relevant to management of zoonotic coronaviruses and emerging viruses as below:

1. Research relevant to risk assessment and risk management of zoonotic coronaviruses, including virus characterization, pathogenicity and transmission studies, development of vaccines, and biological and diagnostic reagents..
2. Zoonotic coronavirus diagnostic assay development, validation and/or support to countries on implementation.
3. Surveillance, epidemiology and epidemiological information analysis, support to risk analysis and risk management.
4. Monitoring and management of zoonotic coronavirus at human-animal-environment interface, focusing on the research support services needed related to spillover from the wildlife to domestic animals.

As per the [Director-General's Bulletin 2006/32](#)¹, FAO Reference Centres are institutions designated by the Director-General to provide independent technical and scientific advice on issues related to FAO's mandate and its programme. The institutions to be recommended for designation as a "FAO Reference Centre" should have demonstrated, through previous collaboration with one or more of FAO's technical units, the following:

1. Active engagement in fields of expertise relevant to the work of the Organization and contribution to the implementation of its programme priorities and to strengthening capacities in countries and regions;
2. Ability to carry out one or several of the following functions:
 - a. Standardization of technology, therapeutic and other substances, and of methods/procedures;
Provision of reference materials and services such as quality assurance;
Participation in collaborative research of a scientific, technical or policy nature;
 - b. Contribution to capacity development *inter alia* through the provision of training;
 - c. Coordination of activities carried out by other institutions;
Provision of information and advice of a scientific, technical and policy nature.

How to apply

The FAO Reference Centre for Zoonotic Coronaviruses status would be valid for a period of four years. An annual report of the Institution's support activities related to work as a Reference Centre will be required. A renewal of the status as FAO Reference Centre is possible depending on the activities undertaken and the value and strength of the collaboration. The designated Reference Centre will enjoy name recognition and association with a United Nations agency, including the possibility of using FAO's name, emblem and other logos under set conditions (as described in the [Director-General's Bulletin 2006/32](#)).

Should this designation as a FAO Reference Centre be of interest to your institution, being able to use the institution's own resources to fulfill several of the above listed functions. Please follow the instructions as below.

Documents needed as follow:

1. Fill out the application with the template of Guidelines (see page 3 and 4).
2. Fill out the "Declaration of Interest" (Annex 1 of [DG Bulletin 2006/32](#))
3. Acknowledge the information provided in the "Disclaimer and other legal provisions" (Annex 3 of [DG Bulletin 2006/32](#)).

Application should be submitted via e-mail to fao-coronavirus-reference-centre@fao.org with a due date of **15 October 2020** for review.

For any questions, please contact [us](#)

¹ http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/partners/docs/DGbulletin_2006_32_en.pdf

Guidelines for applicants for designation as FAO Reference Centre for Zoonotic Coronaviruses

1. Name and address of the institute (email address, website, fax and phone numbers)
2. Name and contact information of director of the institute
3. Name and contact information of the head of the Reference Centre
4. Legal status and governance arrangements of the institute
5. Source of funding
6. Number of staff members, including expert(s) in the relevant field with brief curriculum vitae.
7. Mandate, areas of expertise and activities of the institute
8. Expertise and list of activities on zoonotic coronavirus (e.g.: SARS, MERS, COVID-19) and other emerging viruses in at least the last 3 years:
 - a. Research relevant to risk assessment and risk management of zoonotic coronaviruses, including virus characterization, pathogenicity and transmission studies, development of vaccines, and biological and diagnostic reagents.
 - b. Zoonotic coronavirus diagnostic assay development, validation and/or support to countries on implementation.
 - c. Surveillance, epidemiology and epidemiological information analysis, support to risk analysis and risk management.
 - d. Monitoring and management of zoonotic coronavirus at human-animal-environment interface, focusing on the research support services needed related to spillover from the wildlife to domestic animals.
9. Description of facilities and biosafety labs, including their level of biocontainment, that support research and service activities conducted in your institution.
10. Describe technical and throughput capacities of your laboratories in regards to:
 - a. Laboratory testing capabilities. For example: RT-PCR, multiplex assays, next generation diagnostic techniques, etc.
 - b. Approximate number of tests performed annually per technique, and turn-around time of testing, including reporting of results.
 - c. Distribution of national and international submissions process by your institution (with details on countries, companies, NGOs, or international organizations to which those services are provided).
11. Service/technical support that could be provided to FAO and/or Members, particularly to low and middle income countries, please provide examples in at least the last 3 years, including technical expertise and training to build laboratory capacity, sharing of accredited SOPs with other institutions, available reagents and technical support, etc.
12. Institutional Experience and Collaboration in at least the last three years:
 - a. List of joint/collaborative projects with other institutes, reference centres and countries, with special emphasis on collaborations in low and middle income countries.

- b.** Bench and field training provided at national and international levels. List of languages by which training can be provided and beneficial countries.
 - c.** List of abstracts, proceedings, peer-reviewed and technical publications concerning the coronavirus/subject area.
 - d.** The extent and history of collaborations with FAO in relevant areas (projects, consultations, training, technical and scientific advice, etc).
 - e.** Examples of sharing data and information, transferring technologies and procedures with partners in relevant areas.
- 13.** Capability and certification for timely receiving diagnostic specimens and shipping dangerous goods.
 - 14.** Anticipated benefits and envisaged future collaboration with FAO as Reference Centre
 - 15.** Any other relevant information.

For any correspondence related to this matter, please write to fao-coronavirus-reference-centre@fao.org.