



FAO/OIE International Animal Health Communicators' Roundtable April 16 - 19, 2007, Rome

COMMUNIQUÉ

Multi-disciplinary experts attending a four-day FAO/OIE international animal health communicator's roundtable in Rome agreed to develop a global animal health communication strategy to support the FAO/OIE Global Strategy for Prevention and Control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1.

The purpose of the meeting was to define the contribution of communication as a process in the response to the on-going threat of the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus, and in stopping its spread at source in poultry.

It was recognized that communication strategies should be embedded in a framework that adheres to the principles of inclusion, participation and self-determination. Effective communication values local knowledge and socio-cultural norms while at the same time strengthening capacity through the provision of relevant technical information. In this way, the response to animal diseases can be understood, contextualized and acted upon at all levels.

The meeting acknowledged the need for a comprehensive communication strategy which is integral to a coherent response to major zoonotic disease outbreaks such as highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1. It identified that communication professionals brought specialized skills to augment and improve the effectiveness of the technical aspects of the prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery phases of animal disease occurrences.

While significant work has already been undertaken with regard to animal health communication, several gaps were identified which need to be addressed as part of the strategy.

The experts recognized the urgent need to strengthen communication capacity and the role of communication professionals in the process of supporting responses to emerging animal diseases, including those that pose a risk to human health, specifically highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1.

Recommendations of the meeting included the need to:

- Advocate the importance of the process of communication, and the need for enhanced capacity-building in this area, as critical elements in addressing and managing animal health issues
- Ensure that strategic communication is integrated into the veterinary infrastructure and policy response at country level, and to gain international support for this where required
- Establish an international network of animal health communication experts dealing with this disease to work in cooperation with animal health experts, as well as with other relevant partners
- Develop a comprehensive communication action plan to address the animal health aspects of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 transmission, including the creation of communication tools for immediate use and longer-term strategies to sustain positive social and behavioural change
- Ensure consistency in messaging and accuracy of technical information which is adaptable to local contexts, and
- Develop a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to communication that engages all relevant stakeholders in a participatory and inclusive process.

Additionally, the experts recognized that communication strategies adopted for highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 will be applicable to other emerging and re-emerging animal diseases.

The list of participants attending the roundtable is annexed to this communiqué.

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FAO/OIE International Animal Health Communicators' Roundtable, Rome, 16 - 19 April 2007

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