

A/H1N1 influenza like human illness in Mexico and the USA : OIE statement

Paris, 27 April 2009 - A virus circulating in Mexico and the USA 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.

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.

Any current information in influenza like animal disease in Mexico or the USA 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 their geographic name, eg Spanish influenza or Asiatic influenza, thus it would be logical to call this disease "North-American influenza".

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.

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.

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.

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.

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