

A man wearing a white lab coat, a blue surgical mask, and a white hairnet is standing in a pig farm. He is looking towards the camera. In the background, there are several pigs in metal cages. The lighting is warm and natural, suggesting an indoor farm environment.

Supporting animal health systems in times of COVID-19: OIE's response

IN DEPTH

Supporting animal health systems in times of COVID-19: OIE's response

by Dr Monique Eloit, Director General, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

In a few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our communities and ways of life. With devastating effects on society in nearly all countries of the globe, it has also heavily challenged our food supply chains, livelihoods, economies as well as animal production systems. All are indeed intrinsically linked.

The unprecedented nature of this pandemic and the mysteries around this virus have required new and innovative approaches to tackle it. At a time when much uncertainty remains and much work still needs to be undertaken to understand how the virus entered the human population, one certainty abides: collaboration across sectors is key to respond to this crisis.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has been intensively working with its network of experts and liaising with its Members to better understand the virus and its emergence and to enhance countries' capacity to respond to this multifaceted crisis. In these times where solidarity is more important than ever, the animal health sector has been supporting the response capacity of human health services in various ways while contributing to accompany the animal production sector in addressing critical needs, such as food provision.



Dr Monique Eloit is the Director General of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Prior to her election, she occupied the function of OIE Deputy Director General (2009-2016). Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, she has also been the Chief Veterinary Officer of France and National Delegate to the OIE (2005- 2009).



Supporting the public health response to COVID-19 and ensuring a continuum in animal production

Through its mission to set animal health and welfare standards, to inform and to build capacity, the OIE has been fully mobilised to support the work of its partners and to accompany animal health professionals in maintaining sound animal production systems.

Within days, the OIE has put in place an Incident Management System to coordinate its response to COVID-19 internally and with external key partners. It has mobilised several expert groups to provide scientific advice and to develop guidelines on a range of topics. These include identifying research priorities as well as assessing the implications of COVID-19 for animal health and veterinary public health and for trade in animals and animal products.

Following widespread human infection, several cases have been reported in animals (mostly pets), including in mink production systems.

As well as ensuring the dissemination of official information on such events, [***a guidance on the rationale for testing animals***](#) was developed to support public and animal health risk assessment and risk management. The OIE will continue to communicate timely and verified science-based information to the international community as new knowledge comes to light.

Facilitating safe international trade of animals and their products

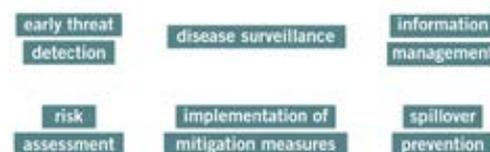
The International trade has been heavily challenged over the last months. Yet, facilitating safe trade of animals and animal products, in line with OIE Standards, is crucial to avoid the interruption of food chains for the most vulnerable populations. In this context, as evidence from risk assessments, epidemiological investigations and experimental studies do not suggest that live animals or animal products play a role in SARS-CoV-2 infection of humans (i.e. the current COVID-19 pandemic is sustained by human-to-human transmission), the OIE [***has called countries not to take sanitary restrictions***](#) linked to COVID-19 unless there is scientific justification for doing so, in line with the recommendations of its expert group on the topic.

Preserving the livestock-wildlife interface

Human activities such as intensive deforestation or wildlife trade have an impact on the health and balance of ecosystems. Several recent spillover events linked to poorly regulated wildlife trade, including SARS and Ebola virus, have resulted in severe socio-economic crises. Considering that COVID-19 has possibly originated from wildlife, it is crucial to address the risk of spillover events at the human-livestock-ecosystems interface, whilst preserving welfare and biodiversity. In a recent [***statement***](#), the OIE highlighted the need to support legal, sustainable and responsible wildlife use. Looking to the future, it has initiated an ambitious work programme to motivate the implementation of good practices in wildlife trade and facilitate the implementation of integrated wildlife surveillance systems. This will aim to produce new guidelines, and if necessary international standards, which will cover transportation, capture, farming, marketing, and consumption of wildlife.



Ensuring best practices and safe wildlife trade in countries relies on:



IN DEPTH

A multisectoral approach

The COVID-19 pandemic has awoken the need for longstanding and sustainable One Health collaboration. From the start of the crisis, existing Tripartite frameworks for emergency management have been used. OIE experts have participated in the WHO's International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee on COVID-19 and have supported the WHO R&D blueprint, which allows the rapid and coordinated activation of research and development activities.

Beyond collaborative research activities, the animal health sector has contributed in various ways towards building a common response to the pandemic in the field and supporting the work of human health authorities. The provision of testing capacity by animal health laboratories or the donation of essential materials such as personal protective equipment and ventilators are some examples.

Planning ahead

COVID-19 has disrupted our present time so much that it has sent shockwaves into the future, creating greater fragments of uncertainty but also space for innovation. The OIE has been preparing for such an event for several years. Pandemic preparedness and biological threat reduction have been high on the agenda, leading to the establishment of mechanisms such as OFFLU (which would respond to an influenza pandemic of animal origin), a biological threat reduction strategy and several capacity-building projects in animal health emergency management. Experience has shown that collaboration and coordinated action remain essential to address the global change which is reshaping our environment, in terms of climate, human behaviours and land use, for example.

// The COVID-19 pandemic has awoken the need for longstanding and sustainable One Health collaboration. //



Guidelines for safe wildlife trade will result in sustainable and responsible...

- ✓ ...transport
- ✓ ...capture
- ✓ ...farming
- ✓ ...consumption

OIE WORLD ORGANISATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH
Protecting animals, preserving our future



OIE Q&A
on COVID-19