

UK ZOOSES GROUP

SUMMARY OF THE TENTH MEETING, HELD ON 30 June 2006

The UK Zoonoses Group (UKZG) held its tenth meeting on 30 June 2006. The main Agenda items discussed were:

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in milk - An outline of FSA guidance on the safety of unpasteurised milk in relation to MRSA was given. It was reported that MRSA strains are unlikely to be more heat resistant than other strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* and would therefore be destroyed by heat treatment of milk. The Group were informed that implementation of good hygiene should reduce milk contamination with all strains of *Staphylococcus aureus*.

MedVetNet - A paper was presented, updating the Group on an internship on communication science being run by MedVetNet, an EU-funded network consisting of European scientists working for the prevention and control of zoonoses (including food-borne diseases). The internship was open to any current student, researcher or staff member of the MedVetNet partner institutes. Further information can be found at www.medvetnet.org

Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase (ESBL)-producing *Escherichia coli* in cattle – An update was given on an ongoing investigation of an ESBL-producing *E. coli* outbreak that had been detected on a farm in Wales. The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) continued to investigate the antimicrobial resistance situation and a research project was being developed. No resistance had been found other than in the *E. coli* from the farm. This would suggest that this type of resistance was at a very low level in livestock.

Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) rabies and exotic diseases working group - The Group were reminded that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was conducting a review of rabies and exotic animal disease import controls across the EU. Defra was taking forward a parallel review of UK rabies and exotic diseases import policy, with a view to informing the wider EFSA review. Defra had requested that the ACDP form a working group to assist with the production of the Defra review and subsequent report. The first meeting of this group was held on 16 May 2006 to analyse the risk assessments produced independently for the Defra review, focusing on implications for public health, and to provide any further advice as necessary.

West Nile Virus - A summary was provided of West Nile Virus (WNV) surveillance activities in both humans and in wild birds in the UK. Enhanced surveillance over the last four years had found no human cases of UK-acquired WNV, and there had been no isolates of WNV from UK birds. Some

human cases had been detected in the UK but were travel-related and not indigenously acquired.

Rabies and European Bat Lyssavirus – A background note and update was provided by Defra, which summarised the findings of the various UK surveys so far.

Hydatid Disease - The Group was updated on steps taken against the possible re-emergence of hydatid disease (*Echinococcus granulosus*) in Wales. It was considered that English counties that border Wales may also be at risk from the spread of this disease. Since the last UKZG meeting in December 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government had begun a programme to consider ways to address this problem, beginning with a publicity campaign to raise public awareness. A communications pack had been sent to all GPs, dentists, pharmacists and veterinary practices in Wales in May 2006. These packs contained a covering letter, poster, leaflet and a Q&A sheet and it is hoped that this material will be displayed in waiting rooms to raise public awareness. Given that many holdings straddle the English/Welsh border and that hydatid disease had been identified in sheep on the English side in the past, it was agreed that action be taken in English counties bordering Wales with a similar publicity campaign in these counties. This campaign would also be promoted at agricultural shows on the English side of the border.

Bovine TB Strategy – The Group was updated on progress with the new bovine TB strategy. It was noted that the new pre-movement TB testing requirements for cattle in Scotland had found no cases of bovine TB since its inception in September 2005.

Avian Influenza – Members were updated on various issues concerning Avian Influenza (AI). It was noted that there had been relatively few cases of AI in people worldwide over the past three years indicating that the virus is not a particularly effective zoonoses, especially taking into account the large number of people who have probably been exposed to the virus but had not developed any illness as a result of such exposure. There has been very little serosurveillance work done worldwide, although the World Health Organisation is trying to remedy this. In the limited surveillance that has been done there is no evidence of widespread asymptomatic cases in people that had been exposed to infected poultry. An update was also given of the current world situation regarding cases of AI in birds. A report was given on progress on the Defra Wild Bird Survey, giving a breakdown of the numbers and categories of birds tested. Further information on AI may be found at:

www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm

www.hpa.org.uk

www.dh.gov.uk

www.ec.europa.eu/comm/food/animal/diseases/adns/index_en.htm

Reports from other committees and items of interest – A standing Agenda item to inform members of any relevant reports from other committees/groups with an interest in zoonoses or antimicrobial resistance and miscellaneous items of interest connected with zoonoses. Highlights of items included in the Agenda paper are shown below:

The following subjects were covered.

- **Recent case of *Corynebacterium ulcerans* in a person** - In January 2006 a patient contracted a toxigenic *Corynebacterium ulcerans* infection. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) contacted the VLA as the patient was known to have visited a dairy farm. Milk samples were taken from some individual cows and the bulk tank on the farm. Additional samples were also taken from a milk filter and from dogs, cats and a guinea pig on the farm. *C. ulcerans* was isolated from two throat swabs from the dogs but not from the milk or other animals. The milk was sent for pasteurisation as a precaution. The dogs received more than one course of treatment and finally tested negative in April.
- **Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC)** – The minutes of the last meeting of SEAC in April 2006 were provided for information. Further information may be found at: www.seac.gov.uk
- **Microbiological Safety of Food Funders Group (MSFFG)** – Members were informed that the MSFFG would publish a report on publicly-funded research in relation to *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (MAP) on the FSA website in June. Two further MSFFG reports on research relating to farm and abattoir waste management and to *Brucella* were nearing completion. These would be published on the FSA website in September 2006. Further information may be found at:

www.food.gov.uk/science/research/researchinfo/foodborneillness/microfunders/msffg/

- **National Expert Panel on New and Emerging Infections (NEPNEI)** - The Panel last met in May 2006. The panel discussed West Nile Virus. A referral had previously been made to the Panel by the Specialist Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance (SACAR) requesting a review of surveillance for antimicrobial resistance in humans. A working group to address this was formed, and reported back to SACAR that there were gaps in this type of surveillance, especially in clinical prescribing. Further information on NEPNEI may be found at:
www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/emerging_infections/NEPNEI.htm
- **Surveillance Group on Diseases and Infections in Animals (SGDIA)** - A summary of the last meeting of the SGDIA was provided. Items discussed included a forthcoming Johne's Disease survey,

implementation of the Zoonoses Directive and Regulation, the Veterinary Surveillance Strategy, Trichinella and the UK Poultry Register. Further information may be found at:

www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/vetsurveillance/sgdia/index.htm

- **Defra Antimicrobial Resistance Co-ordination Group (DARC)** – A summary of the last DARC Group meeting in February 2006 was provided. The Group was working on an overarching antimicrobial resistance report for the UK and several options for its publication and use were being considered.
- **MRSA in animals – Conference in Liverpool** - A conference on MRSA in animals was held in Liverpool in mid-June 2006. Delegates concluded that there was a need for further work, particularly to establish risk factors for infection of and transmission between the main species identified (dogs, cats, horses and humans) and to help clarify the risk posed to both animal and human health. Other areas that were given consideration included standardisation of testing, guidelines for the management of MRSA in animals and in-contact humans, the development of a MRSA database and an external quality assessment of MRSA data.
- **Recent case of Anthrax in South Wales** - An overview of an outbreak of anthrax in South Wales was given, where 2 cattle were found to have died from the disease in April 2006. Restrictions were placed on the farm in question by the State Veterinary Service (SVS), and were lifted in May following no reoccurrence of the disease. Investigations were conducted in conjunction with the HPA.
- **VLA Zoonoses Surveillance Highlights** - A paper was presented for members' information. Further information may be found at:
www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/vla/science/science-end-survrep.htm
- **EU survey of holdings with laying hens for presence of *Salmonella*** - Following an EU-wide survey for *Salmonella* in laying hen flocks, EFSA had published a preliminary report on the analysis of the survey results. The UK was found to be in the top third of Member States with a low prevalence of the pathogen.