

UK ZONOSSES GROUP

SUMMARY OF THE SEVENTH MEETING, HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2004

The UK Zoonoses Group (UKZG) held its seventh meeting on 9 November 2004. The main Agenda items discussed were:

National Outbreak Control Team for *Salmonella Enteritidis* Non Phage Type 4 – A report was made on the work of National Outbreak Control Team convened by the Health Protection Agency to look into continued outbreaks of *Salmonella Enteritidis* non-phage type 4 since the start of 2002. Over 2,000 cases of salmonella linked to outbreaks of *Salmonella Enteritidis* non-phage type 4 had been confirmed by laboratory testing during this period, which is estimated could represent around 6,000 cases in the community. Many of the outbreaks had been linked to eggs originating in Spain used in the catering trade. The Team, which includes representatives from the Food Standards Agency, Department of Health, National Public Health Service Wales, Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health and Defra, were drafting a dossier to be presented to the appropriate Spanish authority and the Commission. Members emphasised the importance of continuing to promote the basic advice to consumers using raw shell eggs - for eggs to be cooked properly and to maintain best practice in the preparation and storage of food in kitchen and personal hygiene.

Rabies and European Bat Lyssavirus – A presentation was made on the current research and surveillance programme for the presence of European Bat Lyssavirus (EBL) in Great Britain. The presentation also covered risk factors associated with travel to rabies endemic countries and noted the recent case in a dog imported illegally into France. The importance of characterizing the pathology of human EBL was also signalled.

West Nile Virus- Members were informed that a contingency plan for the protection of public health was published by the Department of Health on 31 May 2004. Members were also invited to provide views on the future surveillance requirements for West Nile Virus which was under review.

Avian Flu - Members were advised that the Department of Health, in collaboration with Health Protection Agency and academia, were looking at the development of vaccines against a range of avian and other influenza strains. Options for reducing the time required to produce large quantities of new flu vaccine were also being considered as part of the Department of Health's contingency planning for

pandemic influenza. Comments on the proposed measures taken in response to the threat from Avian Influenza were invited, either through the Secretariat or directly to the Department of Health.

Polioencephalomyelitis in a heifer - Members were updated on the case of polioencephalomyelitis in a heifer brought to the attention of members at the last meeting of the UKZG. Since then a letter had been published on the case in the Veterinary Record and an expert group convened, headed by the Health Protection Agency (HPA), to assess the potential risk to human health. In addition to the case in the heifer, the expert group reviewed other cases of polioencephalomyelitis and polioencephalitis in cattle and sheep in which, after routine investigation by the Veterinary Laboratory Agency, an aetiological agent was not identified. A statement from the expert group published on the HPA website concluded that these cases represented a variety of clinical and pathological syndromes and unlikely to pose a significant risk to human health.

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

■ *Microbiological Safety of Food Funders Group (MSFFG)* – An updated version of the MSFFG report on UK publically funded research on Verocytotoxin producing *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) was published in October 2003. In May 2004 the MSFFG also published an updated report on publicly funded research on campylobacter and is currently drafting reports on *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Yersinia enterocolitica* and Farm & abattoir waste management.

■ *Surveillance Group on Diseases and Infections of Animals (SGDIA)* – The SGDIA met on 28 October 2004. It was agreed that the UK Zoonoses Group should be consulted on the public health benefits of the proposed Johne's Disease prevalence study prepared by a sub-group of the SGDIA. This issue was raised under Any Other Business.

■ *National Expert Panel on New and Emerging Diseases (NEPNEI)* - A template to assess the risks from zoonotic infections in England and Wales, developed by the Health Protection agency was endorsed by NEPNEI.

■ *Pet Travel Scheme* – Since July 2004 the European Regulation on the animal health requirements for the non-commercial movement of

pet animals has been applicable to the UK. The main changes relate to the introduction of a pet passport for dogs, cats and ferrets, an expanded list of qualifying countries, and the requirements for other species. For dogs and cats, the Regulation allows the rules of the UK Pet Travel Scheme to continue largely unchanged for 5 years.

■ *Publication of the Zoonoses Report UK 2003* – The 2003 report was to be launched at a conference on 22 November at the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge to release the results of a repeat abattoir survey to determine the prevalence of foodborne zoonotic organisms in cattle, sheep and pigs at slaughter in Great Britain carried out in 2003. A copy of this can be found on the Defra website at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/zoonoses/reports.htm>

■ *International Zoonoses Conference* - The Health Protection Agency in partnership with Defra, Department of Health and Food Standards Agency, was organising a conference on zoonoses to be held in Liverpool in June 2005.

■ *UK Health Department's Contingency Plan for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)* - Although the risk of SARS entering to the UK was considered to be low, it was not negligible, and in response the Department of Health had produced a draft contingency plan to provide a framework for an integrated response should SARS re-emerge here. The aim was to publish the final plan on the DH website by the end of November 2004. The Health Protection Agency was producing a contingency plan for SARS with emphasis on the clinical and laboratory aspects of dealing with cases or suspected cases.

■ *A report on VLA's zoonoses activities* – This consisted of a summary of key points relating to zoonotic or potentially zoonotic infections arising from VLA's science programmes for the period from January 2004 to June 2004.

v **Any Other Business** –

The following subjects were raised:

■ *Proposal for a dairy herd prevalence study for Johne's Disease* - Members agreed that establishing the prevalence of *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (MAP) in the UK dairy herd was not a significant human health issue while the suggested link between MAP and Crohn's disease in humans still remained unproven. The primary requirement was to resolve the issue of a possible causative link between MAP and Crohn's. An expert group headed by Professor Sarah O'Brien was to be established by the Department of Health to

consider what further research was needed to provide a definitive answer to this issue.

■ *Suspected case of Glanders* – Members were informed that a horse (and 17 in-contacts) was currently under precautionary movement restrictions in Gloucestershire following a sero-positive result to the Complement Fixation Test (CFT) for Glanders (*Burkholderia mallei*) during a routine pre-export blood test. Further tests were to be carried out⁽¹⁾. Due to problems with specificity of the currently available tests for Glanders it was agreed consideration should be given to a national collaborative effort to improve the reliability of test results. A paper on this issue would be presented at the next meeting.

(1) Further confirmatory tests were negative for Glanders. For more information on Glanders go to:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/glanders.htm>