

Issues Alert #17

Situation update on Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

Monday 27th July 2009

Note that Issues Alerts will only be produced as required

With pandemic (H1N1) 2009 confirmed in all Australian states and territories, stringent biosecurity on-farm remains critical! APL recommends that unnecessary visitors to a piggery should be discouraged. Piggery employees, especially those in close contact with the animals, should notify their manager or leading hand if any members of their family or any people they have frequent contact with are exhibiting flu or flu-like symptoms.

Current Information Updates

- **Argentina pig tests positive for H1N1 Flu** — Argentinean authorities have announced a national animal health alert as the influenza A (H1N1) virus had been detected on a second pig farm in the Buenos Aires province. As no outside animals had been moved into the area recently, Senasa (Argentina's animal health and sanitation service) is working on the theory that the contamination at the pig farms has happened through contact with infected workers. The Argentine government farm spokesman said 800 pigs had tested positive for H1N1 flu, but that the two workers suspected of passing the virus have not yet received doctor confirmation that they are carrying the flu strain. It is likely that this is the second man-to-pig transmission of the novel H1N1 virus, after a case in Alberta, Canada, a couple of months ago. Canadian health officials said a traveller carried the new virus from Mexico to Canada, possibly infecting his family and a herd of swine in May, but tests later showed the man was not the source of infection. However, they did not rule out the possibility the virus could still have been transmitted into the herd by a person.
- **First commercial pig farm worker in Britain contracts H1N1 flu** - The stockman from the South West worked on a commercial pig farm. Other staff and pigs on the farm are free of the H1N1 virus but veterinary experts are working with the pig industry to agree a code of practice should pig herds become infected with the flu strain.
- **Humans can catch H1N1 from pigs** - Two Canadian Food Inspection Agency inspectors appear to have contracted swine flu while investigating an outbreak of the new virus in pigs on an Alberta farm in late April. It's known that the men did not use proper safety techniques while in the barn, apparently removing the N-95 respirators that covered their noses and mouths because they were hot. The cases appear to be the first reports of people catching the new H1N1 virus from pigs.

- **OIE Recommendations** - Although the pandemic H1N1 2009 virus continues spreading among humans throughout the world, the World Organization for Animal Health (O.I.E.) has reiterated that there is no evidence animals are playing any role in the epidemiology or spread of the virus. The O.I.E. has made the following recommendations:
 - National veterinary services must effectively monitor animal populations for clinical signs of respiratory disease, use appropriate confirmation diagnostic methods and rapidly report occurrences of the disease in animals, if any, to the O.I.E. by using the qualification of "emerging disease".
 - Should the presence of the "pandemic H1N1 2009 virus" be detected on a farm, the holding should be placed under surveillance and control of movements should be applied; the transfer of pigs from the farm to the slaughterhouse can be done using basic bio-security measures.
 - Culling pigs will not help to guard against public or animal health risks presented by the virus. As for any other disease, slaughtering of sick pigs for human consumption is not recommended.
 - Imposing bans related to importing pigs and pig products from countries with human or animal cases are pointless and do not comply with international standards published by the O.I.E. and all other competent standard setting international bodies for animal health and food safety
 - Pork and pork products, handled in accordance with good hygienic practices jointly recommended by the W.H.O., F.A.O., Codex Alimentarius Commission and the O.I.E, are not a source of infection from the virus.
- **EU prepares law for H1N1 on pig farms** - The European Commission is working on legislation in case an outbreak of the novel influenza A virus (H1N1) is found on a pig farm in the European Union.
- **Vaccination Program** - The federal government has already ordered 21 million doses of the vaccine, which are reported to be available in August 2009. From January next year, all pregnant women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 to 50 will be able to access the seasonal flu vaccine free from their GPs. APL has approached the Department of Health to ensure that pig vets and piggery workers vaccinated as a priority.
- **The pandemic H1N1 2009 virus in Australia** has been characterised by the mildness of symptoms in the overwhelming majority of patients, who usually recover, even without medical treatment, within a week of the onset of symptoms. The groups experiencing most of the severe disease and death are those in the risk groups of people with chronic underlying medical conditions (this includes morbid obesity), pregnant women and young children (especially under two years of age). The average age of patients is 15. A patient with seasonal flu

usually passes it on to an average of 1.2 or 1.4 other people. Swine flu, however, appears to be twice as contagious.

GREATER VILGILANCE: ON-FARM BIOSECURITY!

With pandemic H1N1 2009 cases confirmed now in all Australian states and territories, it is critical that pork producers are vigilant with biosecurity to protect against disease incursion. APL is recommending that:

Piggery employees, especially those in close contact with the animals, should notify their manager or leading hand if any members of their family or any people they have frequent contact with are exhibiting flu or flu-like symptoms:

- Establish, implement and enforce strict sick leave policies for workers presenting influenza like symptoms such as fever, cough, body aches, and sometimes vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Implement biosecurity for workers reporting international travel.

During periods of higher risk such as the current pandemic H1N1 2009, visitors to a piggery should be discouraged. Exclude contact between pigs and people with any sign of fever or flu-like symptoms. Exclude contact between pigs and people that have returned from overseas travel within the last 7 -10 days:

- Conduct a risk assessment of anyone coming into contact with your herd and implement mitigation measures for any risks that are considered too high.
- Minimise the contact visitors have with your herd and use effective decontamination procedures
- Assess the health of any pigs coming onto the property, utilise quarantine principles and prevent those assessed as a high risk from entering.
- Do not ever feed swill to pigs. It is illegal in Australia to do so.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment between uses.
- Regularly inspect your herd for unusual signs of disease and report any problems to your veterinarian, state or territory government animal health officer or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline - 1800 675 888.

Other contacts

- **APL – 1800 789 099** or <http://www.australianpork.com.au/pages/page140.asp> - For more information and updates on PorkSAFE issues
- **Pandemic H1N1 2009 Hotline: 1802007** – For the general public and people returning from the Americas with flu-like symptoms.
- **Emergency Animal Disease Watch hotline: 1800 675 888** - Producers are encouraged to check their properties regularly and if they see anything unusual to call the hotline.