

Prevention in practice

Prevention and control of zoonotic diseases

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The organizational principles of national zoonoses control programmes depend on the epidemiological pattern of these diseases and on the availability and structure of health care services. They are interrelated with farming practices, habits and levels of urbanization, as well as trade in animals and animal products. Success in the prevention and control of major zoonoses depends on the capability to mobilize resources in different sectors and on coordination and intersectoral approaches, especially between national veterinary and public health services. Community participation is vitally important in order to achieve good results.

Several international agencies are interested in zoonoses control such as WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Organisation internationale des Epizooties (OIE) and collaborating centres. Close cooperation exists between WHO and FAO and their collaborating centres in Berlin, Germany (FAO/WIHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Food Hygiene and Zoonoses), in Weybridge, England (FAO/WIHO Collaborating Centre for Brucellosis) and in Rome, Italy (FAO/WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Veterinary Public Health). This collaboration is mainly in the form of training and technical advice.

Another form of such cooperation is the Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Programme (MZCP) which was initiated in 1978 by a number of countries and WHO with the objective of fostering countrywide programmes for the control of zoonoses and related foodborne diseases as an integral part of national health programmes. The programme exchanges, between Member States, the most recent available information on the epidemiological situation, provides technical guidelines and documents, organizes meeting and training courses and provides technical assistance.

The WHO/EMRO regional zoonoses control programme has the objective of reducing suffering and death from zoonoses and related foodborne diseases in man by reducing their incidence, severity and transmission from animals to humans. The approaches to achieve these targets are implemented at both the country and regional levels. It is gratifying to note the growing awareness among Member States of the need for developing programmes for the control of zoonoses and foodborne disease.

Control of major zoonoses has not been achieved to the degree that will lead to their eradication from the majority of the countries in the Region. In some countries a number of zoonoses have been rather reasonably controlled, in others control pro-

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grammes are in progress with positive results and in the rest spasmodic efforts are made from time to time, which, of course, do not lead to satisfactory results. Legislation in some Member States does not always follow the guidelines and recommendations given by the competent international organizations. Moreover, the exact incidence of some zoonoses is not precisely known in the Region, despite the fact that they are notifiable diseases.

Many zoonotic diseases create important public health problems in some countries of the Region. The significance of zoonoses in the Region is increasing due to increase in animal husbandry practice and importation of food and food products of animal origin. All countries of the Region

acknowledge the necessity to have veterinary public health activities (zoonoses and food hygiene) as an integral part of their health care programmes. Some of them have national plans for the control of specific zoonotic diseases based on the available resources and strategies.

In spite of the progress achieved, brucellosis and rabies, etc. still constitute a threat to human health and welfare. Therefore, there is a felt need that Member States should strengthen health education about zoonoses prevention, particularly among high-risk groups of the population and make the maximum use of international cooperation in the field of information exchange, technology transfer, training and research.

The Regional Office continued to assist countries in surveillance and control of major zoonoses such as brucellosis, rabies, echinococcosis and zoonotic salmonellosis. Particular attention was given to strengthening of national capabilities for surveillance of zoonotic infections. National training courses on surveillance of zoonoses were organized in Islamic Republic of Iran, Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan and Tunisia. Fellows from Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran and Syrian Arab Republic received overseas training in laboratory diagnosis, organization of surveillance and management of human aspects of zoonotic diseases.

Source: The work of WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Annual Report of the Regional Director 1 January–31 December 1997, page 130.