Meetings

Role and Objectives of the OIE Sub-Regional Foot and Mouth Disease Coordination Unit for OIE/Gulf Cooperation Council Member Countries and Yemen

The main objective of establishing a Sub-Regional Coordination Unit for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Control in a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member Country is to implement an action plan to control and eradicate FMD, in line with the Global Strategy adopted in Bangkok, Thailand, on 28 June 2012.

As envisaged by the plan, this unit would coordinate national FMD control programmes in Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen, using a common strategy to maximise the efficacy of the campaign throughout the region, for a period of eight years. These seven countries endorsed the plan at the meeting of the OIE Regional Commission for the Middle East, on 26 April 2012, in Dubai, UAE. It is proposed that the unit be established in one GCC country, with the aim of facilitating and promoting international trade in animals and animal products by creating an FMD-free region in the Gulf.

A Progressive Control Pathway for FMD (PCP/FMD) has been developed by the OIE and FAO to assist countries where FMD is still endemic (for example, in the Middle East), to progressively reduce the impact of FMD and the FMD virus load. The PCP/FMD forms the backbone of the Global FAO/OIE Strategy for the control of FMD worldwide.

The role of the Sub-Regional Coordination Unit would be to follow up the progress of these countries in their implementation of the measures required for the FMD Pathway. The unit officers would be responsible for organising yearly national and regional meetings, workshops and training courses relevant to the FMD Pathway. They would help with national FMD control activities in the countries concerned, as well as with bilateral negotiation along national borders, the development of national campaign strategies, the harmonisation of techniques and laboratory diagnostic capabilities, obtaining additional support for national activities, and liaising with the FMD Reference Laboratories.

In addition, the unit would be able to assist in the parallel surveillance and control of other transboundary animal diseases that are important in GCC countries, such as peste des petits ruminants.

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is endemic among ruminants in the Middle East, but periodic and devastating epidemics do occur, spreading rapidly across national and regional borders.

Timetable of activities for FMD:

2013–2014
– Progress from Stage I to Stage II: implementation of an action plan
– End of 2014: meeting for assessment

2015–2016
Progress from Stage II to Stage III: capacity-building in FMD surveillance and control and diagnostic analysis
– End of 2016: meeting for assessment: regional conference on FMD

2017
– Progress towards Stage III
– End of 2017: an application for official recognition of the FMD control programme by the OIE

2018–2020
– Progress towards Stages IV and V
– End of 2020: a declaration of freedom from FMD without vaccination, the final eradication of FMD.
Foot and mouth disease virus strains which emerge from Central Asia, passing through the Middle East to West Eurasia, with a clear pathway of spread along defined routes, are known as ‘waves of infection’, since the appearance of the A22 strain from 1964 to 1972. Links between virus isolates from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey suggest that FMD probably spreads westwards from South-Central Asia, along what has been called ‘Ruminant Street’.

Studies on the geographical distribution and density of livestock populations in South Asia and the Middle East have identified areas of continuous livestock density between the Mediterranean Basin and southern Asia, which create a narrow, east-west connection just south of the Caspian Sea and act as a corridor for the spread of pathogens.

Foot and mouth disease is the most contagious disease of domesticated and wild cloven-hoofed animals, and is caused by a virus of the Aphthovirus genus in the Picornaviridae family. The FMD virus exists as seven different serotypes (O, A, C, Southern African Territories [SAT] 1, SAT 2, SAT 3 and Asia 1), which are not uniformly distributed across the globe. Four out of the seven serotypes have been recorded in the Middle East and Asia (O, A, C, Asia 1).