

# **Brainstorming of scientists, risk assessors and risk managers on the novel A(H1N1) influenza virus at the human animal interface**

## **What needs to be done in Europe in the next months?**

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**Conclusions of the Commission assisted by EFSA and ECDC**

**Key words: vigilance, proportionality and flexibility**

1. It is expected that the novel influenza virus A(H1N1) ("the novel virus") will continue to circulate and spread in the human population in Europe in the coming months, in particular in autumn and winter.
2. Probable human-to-pig transmission of the novel virus has been described on one occasion in Canada and experiments in Europe have shown that the pigs are susceptible to the novel virus.
3. Given the continued spread of this novel virus in the human population, the risk of it entering pig farms in Europe will therefore increase in the next months.
4. From an animal health perspective, current evidence from the single field outbreak, and findings from experimental studies suggest that this novel virus in its current form is unlikely to cause more significant health problems in pigs than those already seen by the swine influenza viruses circulating in pigs in Europe, which is self-limiting infection of the respiratory tract, with some morbidity but generally leading to uneventful recovery.
5. From a human health perspective, the direct and indirect human-to-human routes of transmission will continue to pose the highest risk and account for all human infections. A sustained circulation of this virus in pigs may pose an additional risk for transmission to humans for people in close contact with infected pigs.
6. However, swine influenza is not a food borne zoonosis. Moreover, there is no evidence suggesting that this novel virus behaves in a different way from the other swine influenza viruses and spread to humans via food containing pork or pork products. With regard to infection of pigs via feeding account should be taken of the intra-species feeding ban. This is also supported by the initial data on experimental infection of piglets that have become available in recent weeks, indicating infection of only the respiratory tract and no other tissues and absence of detectable viraemia. Therefore, the recommendations issued by the relevant European and international organizations adequately address the issue of food safety in relation to influenza.
7. The measures to be taken on pig farms addressing human-to-pig transmission, pig-to-pig transmission and pig-to-human transmission should be proportionate to: i) the risk posed by pigs in the transmission of the novel virus to humans, if any, compared to the role played by human-to-human transmission, ii) the severity of disease in animals and humans and iii) risk factors in humans.

8. The most important measure for reducing the risk of human-to-pig transmission is the implementation of bio-security measures on pig farms aimed in particular at reducing the risk that people infected with the novel influenza are in contact with pigs.
9. However, over and above the seasonal vaccination against influenza in human, vaccination of staff working in contact with pigs to protect against the novel virus, when specific vaccines are available, should be considered by authorities as a possible additional measure to reduce the risk of virus circulation between humans and pigs.
10. Vigilance on possible circulation of the novel virus in pig farms should be enhanced.
11. Surveillance for the novel virus in pig farms should: i) in the context of risk management, focus on timely detection of virus on farms with a known risk of human-to-pig transmission; and ii) in the context of risk assessment and research, be aimed at improving our understanding the risk of possible circulation of virus in pig farms, its possible impact on public health and monitor its further evolution.
12. If surveillance activities based on investigations and sampling are carried out in pig farms in order to detect the novel virus, they should be focused on pigs that potentially have been exposed to infected humans and those showing respiratory signs.
13. The data generated by the surveillance/monitoring activities of the ESNIP project has been very informative and useful and the activities should be continued and intensified.
14. The veterinary and public health authorities in the Member States should ensure that adequate information is provided to pig farmers, private veterinarians, general practitioners on the prevention and surveillance measures above, and that the veterinary laboratories have the necessary diagnostic capability.
15. It is too early at this stage to envisage a role of vaccines in the prevention and control of the novel virus in pigs.
16. In case novel virus is detected on a pig farm, proportionate measures to protect humans from this occupational risk should be implemented particularly for persons most likely to experience severe disease.
17. Measures to be taken on pig farms in the next months should however be flexible allowing an adaptation to a possible further evolution of the virus and of its transmission patterns.
18. It is highly desirable that in the EU the initiatives of all stakeholders, including risk assessors, risk managers and researchers are coordinated so that joint efforts result in a more efficient achievement of the objectives. This should in particular include information exchange on collection and analysis of data, identification of gaps for research and formal risk assessment.
19. The guidelines that the relevant international organizations are preparing on biosecurity and surveillance on pig farms will help to shape the EU response to this potential threat.