

Guidelines on COVID-19 communication for OIE staff

May 2020

Context

Following the worldwide developments of COVID-19, a large amount of information from both official and unofficial sources has been circulating in various communication channels.

Research is underway across many sectors in order to gather information about the origin of this new virus, the transmission routes, how to stop its spread and how to treat the increasing number of human cases around the world.

Your responsibility as OIE staff

Health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, entail uncertainties, especially at the beginning and during the acute phase. For consistency and maintaining trust in the Organisation, OIE staff should use technically approved corporate messages or share the messages published on official OIE accounts when discussing the current situation in the framework of their personal communications.

As stated in the *OIE Social Media Policy*, we encourage the use of personal social media accounts to promote the work of the Organisation. Using personal social media accounts to communicate about the OIE can bring a human face to the Organisation's work and help reach wider audiences. However, inappropriate use of social media can undermine the reputation and credibility of the Organisation and the achievement of its mandate.

OIE staff is encouraged to stay up to date with the latest information available about COVID-19. When communicating about the activities of the OIE linked to the current pandemic, you are requested to only relay official OIE information.

Press management

In order to ensure consistency in the answers given to journalists on behalf of the OIE, it is important that the Communication Department centralises press requests. Therefore, kindly forward any request from the press to media@oie.int. The Communication Department will coordinate the answers with relevant OIE technical staff, as well as with the Directorate.

The role of the OIE

Although COVID-19 is driven by human to human transmission, the OIE has been involved since the beginning of the investigations in order to identify a potential role of animals, if and how these could be affected, and providing guidance on collaboration between animal and public health services in order to better face the current pandemic.

All official information available to date and relevant to OIE's mandate is compiled and publicly available in the form of a [Questions & Answers](#) (Q&A) on our global website.

OIE position regarding public communications

While it is true that the virus causing COVID-19 is suspected to have originated from an animal source, the current health crisis is driven by human-to-human transmission. To date, despite several notifications of infected dogs, cats and also minks, **there is no evidence that animals play a relevant role in the transmission of this human disease**. In this context, considering the important impact on human health over the last months, **the OIE has deemed essential to ensure that public attention was not distracted from messages linked to the protection of human health, the number one priority**. Now that the situation is being better controlled, OIE will intensify communications on the different findings, as long as they are linked to its mandate.

The OIE has established the below technical expert groups to provide scientific advice on research priorities, ongoing research, and other implications of COVID-19 for animal health and veterinary public health.

- OIE *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and the human-animal interface (meeting minutes available [online](#))
 - o Sub-group working on animal health laboratories
 - o Sub-group working on animal health surveillance
- OIE *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and safe trade in animals and animal products

The minutes of the group meetings and related guidance documents are available [online](#), at the bottom of the Q&A page.

Additionally, given the similarities between COVID-19 and the emergence of other human infectious diseases at the human-animal interface, the OIE is working with its Wildlife Working Group and other partners to develop a longer term work programme which aims to better understand the dynamics and risks around wildlife trade and consumption, with a view to developing strategies to reduce the risk of future spillover events.

Key messages for OIE staff

- Our official bank of key messages is included in the **OIE Q&A** mentioned above: familiarise yourself with it and feel free to draw messages from it.
- The situation evolves quickly, and the Q&A is being regularly updated: please ensure that your messages are aligned with its latest version: this is important to ensure that we all convey accurate information.

Special notice about the animal health notifications received from OIE Members

- You may have seen in the Q&A that the OIE has received official information from its Members about isolated animals that have tested positive to the COVID-19 virus. These are very rare cases and investigations are already underway. However, the current spread of COVID-19 is a result of human to human transmission. To date, there is no evidence that companion animals spread the disease.
- In order to avoid generating unnecessary alarm, which may lead the public to take actions that can compromise the welfare of companion animals, this information must be handled very carefully. For this, staff is encouraged to align their messages to those of the OIE.

Other information you can relay:

- OIE Press release: Responding to the COVID-19 crisis: the contribution of the veterinary profession
- [WVA/OIE Joint statement](#)
- B. Karesh videos
 - o [Twitter thread](#)
 - o [YouTube playlist](#)
 - o [Facebook](#)
 - o [LinkedIn](#)
- OIE social media posts ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#))
- Information from the [WHO website](#)