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ONE HEALTH PRINCIPLES PROTECT HUMAN HEALTH BY ADDRESSING ANIMAL HEALTH SAYS ANIMAL MEDICINES AUSTRALIA

THE outbreak in Australia's eastern states of Japanese Encephalitis, a zoonotic mosquito-borne virus that is potentially fatal to humans, pigs and horses, demonstrates the complex and critical interrelationship between the health of people, animals and the environment, Animal Medicines Australia (AMA), the peak body representing veterinary medicines and animal health in Australia, said today.

This connection and its principles, termed 'One Health' originated in the early 2000's in response to the SARS pandemic and has been subsequently developed and endorsed via a collaboration between the FAO, OIE and WHO (the Tripartite). As a concept, One Health can help governments, industries and communities better respond to illness and diseases, said Ben Stapley, Executive Director of Animal Medicines Australia.

"One Health is a governing set of principles that recognises the health of humans is increasingly entwined to the health of animals and our shared environments," said Mr. Stapley.

"This approach has become more important than ever in the past decade as environmental, social and economic issues have changed interactions between people, animals, plants, and our environment."

Recent deaths in Australia as a result of Japanese Encephalitis are a tragic reminder of the need for effective biosecurity as well as innovative new animal health tools and diagnostics. By ensuring that our animals are protected from zoonotic diseases such as Japanese Encephalitis, we can prevent these diseases being transmitted to humans.

"Australia has an enviable record on the global stage in protecting the health of its livestock, equine and companion animals against deadly zoonotic diseases such as rabies and foot and mouth disease," says Mr. Stapley.

"However, with two people sadly deceased and 19 other people infected with this outbreak, it highlights the fact human and animal health are intrinsically linked. While the immediate focus is rightly on human health impacts, we should not overlook the serious impact Japanese Encephalitis also has on animal health and welfare."

According to global animal health association, Health for Animals, 60% of diseases in the world are zoonotic which means they are transmissible between animals and humans, with the majority thought to originate from wildlife. Rabies, one of the world's deadliest zoonotic diseases, kills 59,000 people a year.

Mr. Stapley says as a human vaccine is rolled out to people in high-risk areas in Australia's eastern states, there is currently no animal vaccine for Japanese Encephalitis registered in Australia by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Association (APVMA).

"In Australia, the vaccination of pigs is not routinely recommended for the control of Japanese Encephalitis in an outbreak situation," says Mr. Stapley.

"However, in Southeast Asia where Japanese Encephalitis is endemic, a preventative vaccine is used in pig populations at the start of the mosquito season to slow the spread of the virus and reduce the risk to human populations where human and pig populations have a significant interface. It also reduces production losses in pig populations. By protecting the health of animals, we are simultaneously protecting people from zoonotic diseases."

Japanese Encephalitis attacks the brain and spinal cord of vertebrae animals and is particularly prevalent in pigs, horses, migratory water birds and some livestock birds, such as chickens and ducks. It cannot be contracted by eating pork or poultry products, says Mr. Stapley and is transmitted to humans via a mosquito which has bitten an infected animal.

"If an appropriate vaccine for horses is available during an outbreak, voluntary vaccination of horses in and near transmission areas may be encouraged to limit disease and improve animal welfare outcomes," says Mr. Stapley.

"With regards to Japanese Encephalitis, horses are dead-end vectors which means while horses are not immune to getting this virus, they do not spread it any further unlike pigs or poultry. Clinical disease in other domestic livestock species is rare, and the scientific view is that vaccination is not warranted."

There are currently vaccines against Japanese Encephalitis for pigs and horses, but no vaccines for poultry. It is believed this outbreak of Japanese Encephalitis was caused by the proliferation of mosquitoes and infected migratory water birds attracted by recent flood waters.

Ben Stapley says the veterinary medicines industry is at the forefront of developing and delivering new animal health products and stands ready to supply animal health tools and expertise during zoonotic disease outbreaks.

"Protecting and maintaining the health of companion animals and our animal industries is essential to meet Australia's ongoing animal health challenges, and in the context of our global One Health principles, both are vital to humans and animals and to the environment we all share" says Mr. Stapley.

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