

27 April 2024

Veterinarians are essential health workers

The continued spread of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) through domestic poultry and wild bird populations around the world, coupled with the recent transmission from dairy cattle to a worker in the US, demonstrates the importance of recognising the essential and integral role of veterinarians in maintaining and improving public health, Animal Medicines Australia (AMA), the peak body representing veterinary medicines and animal health in Australia, said today.

The theme for the 2024 World Veterinary Day, celebrated on 27 April, is ‘Veterinarians are essential health workers.’

“Improved animal health contributes not only to better animal welfare and improved productivity, but also to better physical and mental health for people, and the environment we share,” said Ben Stapley, Executive Director of Animal Medicines Australia.

“Although it is often not apparent to society, protecting and improving the health of people and our communities is an integral part of the veterinary profession – and it is more important than ever for this role to be recognised and supported by governments and international human and animal health agencies.”

HPAI primarily affects wild birds and poultry, but it can sometimes be transmitted to mammals including, rarely, humans. In the past few years, HPAI has been reported in a variety of aquatic and terrestrial mammals, including most recently cattle in the United States, raising concerns the virus may spill over to other livestock – and the recent transmission of HPAI from infected cattle to a dairy worker has led to concern that the virus may pose a human health risk.

In April, the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) and European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) released a joint report, *Drivers and critical steps for an influenza pandemic due to avian influenza*.

“Australia is currently free from HPAI and the likelihood of transmission of HPAI from animals to humans is low – but this report is a reminder that a genuine, collaborative One Health approach to disease preparedness and response is more important than ever,” said Mr Stapley.

“The report recommended enhanced surveillance for HPAI in animals and humans, as well as strengthening veterinary infrastructure, ensuring access to rapid diagnostics, implementing preventative health measures and, importantly, greater collaboration between animal and human health authorities.”

One Health is a governing set of principles that recognises that the health of humans, animals and our shared environments are intrinsically linked.

“A changing climate and significant global social and economic challenges have changed the way people, animals and our environment interact over the past decade,” said Mr Stapley.

“By implementing One Health surveillance, diagnostic and preventative human and animal health care systems, Australia’s human health, veterinary and agriculture sectors can ensure that Australia is able to prepare for and respond to any potentially zoonotic diseases.

“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 our animals is essential to meet Australia’s ongoing animal health challenges, and in the context of 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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