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**THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN ZONOSES
CONTROL PROGRAMME**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The main objectives of the Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Programme (MZCP) are to promote, at both national and regional levels, programmes for the prevention, surveillance and control of zoonoses and related foodborne diseases; strengthen the collaboration between national animal health and public health services; implement training courses for public health and animal health personnel and laboratory staff; encourage public health education; and foster collaboration between MZCP member countries in these fields.
- The MZCP is governed by a Joint Coordinating Committee and guided by WHO headquarters, Geneva. It collaborates closely with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, specialized WHO collaborating centres and a network of national participating institutions. It also maintains close relationships with the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- The Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Centre (MZCC) based in Athens, Greece, is the coordinating and managing office for the Programme.
- Participating countries are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Kuwait, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. Associated countries, which may participate in Programme activities on an ad hoc basis, are Algeria, Italy, Jordan, Malta, Morocco and Tunisia.
- The MZCP depends on the annual contributions of its participating countries and on the contributions in kind (technical, scientific, etc.) of its collaborating institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Zoonoses and related foodborne diseases are known to cause public health and socioeconomic problems of considerable magnitude in countries of the Mediterranean basin and Middle East. The main factors responsible for zoonotic infections are close contact between human populations and animals; consumption certain of animal products such as unpasteurized milk and dairy products; changes in nutritional habits; intensification of animal production and international trade of animals and animal products; rising numbers of stray and wild carnivores; illegal slaughtering of animals; and inappropriate waste disposal practices.

Decades ago, the affected countries realized that zoonotic diseases, such as brucellosis, echinococcosis, leishmaniasis, rabies and zoonotic salmonellosis, could not be efficiently controlled or eliminated if prevention, surveillance and control activities were carried out in isolation. Effective zoonoses surveillance and control require strong international cooperation. Among other factors, the timely exchange between countries of reliable information on disease occurrence, sustained intercountry technical cooperation, harmonization of surveillance and control strategies and legislation, and intersectoral collaboration and coordination are essential for the success of national programmes for zoonoses prevention, surveillance and control.

This situation was addressed by the World Health Organization at the 31st World Health Assembly held in 1978, which endorsed a resolution (WHA31.48) on the prevention and control of zoonoses and foodborne diseases due to animal products. Following the adoption of this resolution, WHO created the Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Programme (MZCP). In 1979 the Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Centre (MZCC) was established in Athens, Greece, to coordinate and implement the activities of the Programme.

The MZCP collaborates closely with the Department of Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Response in WHO headquarters, as well as with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, specialized WHO collaborating centres and a network of national participating institutions. It also maintains close relationships with the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

2. THE PROGRAMME

Objectives

The main objectives of the Programme are to foster, at both national and regional levels, programmes for the prevention, surveillance and control of zoonoses and related foodborne diseases as an integral part of national public health programmes; to strengthen the collaboration between national animal health and public health services to improve prevention, surveillance and control of these diseases; and to foster cooperation between

MZCP member countries and relevant WHO collaborating centres and national participating institutions.

Participating and associated countries

The MZCP depends on the annual contributions of its participating, or member, countries, and on technical and logistical support from its collaborating institutions. The participating countries are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Kuwait, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. In addition, Algeria, Italy, Jordan, Malta, Morocco and Tunisia are associated countries, which participate in Programme activities on an ad hoc basis. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Italy are expected to join the Programme formally in the near future.

Joint Coordinating Committee

Participating countries meet every two years in a Joint Coordinating Committee, which, together with WHO, is the governing body of the Programme. During each session, the committee evaluates the activities implemented during the past two years and defines the Programme's Plan of Work for the next biennium. In addition to the participating countries, observers from other countries and from international organizations such as OIE, FAO and the European Union attend these meetings.

Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Centre

The Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Centre (MZCC), located in Athens, Greece, implements and coordinates the activities of the Programme, among which are the following:

- planning and conducting training courses
- organizing seminars, workshops, conferences, expert consultations
- organizing individual or group training in laboratory techniques and epidemiology
- planning and coordinating research projects
- publishing and distributing educational and informative material
- promoting surveillance and reporting activities
- fostering intersectoral cooperation between public health and veterinary services
- promoting public health education
- maintaining close cooperation with international organizations
- promoting exchange of information.

Benefits of joining the MZCP

Public health problems and their resolution are international issues. Individual countries alone can no longer cope with communicable diseases, especially zoonoses, in isolation. Such challenges require the creation of effective surveillance networks covering more than one country and the development of human and technical resources for rapid response to epidemics. Information, technology, epidemiology, food safety tools and

regulations must be disseminated and adopted for use by public health and animal health professionals.

A region-wide approach is needed to combat zoonotic and related foodborne diseases. For this reason, the MZCP is working to promote and implement training programmes involving professionals from countries of the Mediterranean basin and Middle East. In this regard, two main categories of activities are included in the MZCP plan of work: intercountry training activities and national training activities.

Intercountry training activities are conducted for trainees nominated by their respective countries and selected in collaboration with the MZCC. It is intended that the trainees who attend these courses will later contribute to the organization of national training courses and workshops in their respective countries. These intercountry training activities are organized by the Centre in cooperation with its collaborating institutions.

National training activities aim at training national staff (mainly physicians and veterinarians) at national and subnational (district) levels. The role of the MZCP in these cases is to provide support to participating countries that have expressed their wish to organize training seminars. This consists of developing the training programme to be adopted by the interested country and providing financial support for international experts and incidental expenses.

The national training activities are based on intersectoral principles with the participation of all parties involved in the implementation of zoonoses prevention and control activities. Such parties may include the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, other relevant administrations at central and district levels, academic institutions, veterinary and medical associations, industry, etc.

The Joint Coordinating Committee recently approved the MZCP Plan of Work for the biennium 2002–2003 (see Annex). It includes intercountry and national training activities in epidemiological surveillance, prevention and control of major zoonoses and in food safety, an international consultation on food safety regulations and international trade, as well as activities in the field of veterinary public health, such as occupational hygiene, urban veterinary hygiene, public health education and veterinary emergency preparedness.

Other areas of MZCP support to countries are:

- provision of consultants
- provision of individual training
- assistance to the management of epidemic emergencies
- activities related to veterinary public health, i.e. occupational health, urban veterinary hygiene, public health education
- dissemination of information
- dissemination of publications.

MZCP membership

Countries wishing to join the MZCP must sign its Statute and agree to an annual contribution of US\$ 20 000. This is the only financial obligation for participating countries, as all MZCP services are free of additional charge. In some countries, responsibility for the annual contribution is shared by the Ministries of Health and Agriculture.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- Close cooperation among countries is essential, as zoonoses and related foodborne diseases cannot be prevented and controlled in isolation.
- The MZCP is aimed at promoting the necessary intersectoral collaboration and coordination.
- The MZCP expert consultations, training courses, country visits, scientific reports and training materials are sources of current information, and provide specific recommendations which may be used to guide selection of appropriate approaches to zoonoses control.
- The MZCP is non-bureaucratic and flexible. It can provide immediate response to the requests of countries and collaborate with other major international organizations.

Annex

MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF THE MZCP FOR THE BIENNIUM 2002–2003

A. International training activities

A.1 Training course on emerging and re-emerging zoonotic diseases intersectoral surveillance and control

Goal: to provide knowledge and skills for the application of an intersectoral surveillance system in the prevention and control of zoonotic and related foodborne diseases.

Specific objective: to provide the general principles of planning, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of zoonotic and related foodborne diseases surveillance, prevention and control programmes.

Learning objectives: to be able to plan an intersectoral surveillance and control system on the emerging and re-emerging zoonotic and related foodborne diseases; be able to manage the national surveillance and control system; identify and use the appropriate analytical methods and techniques for prioritizing actions in the field of controlling emerging and re-emerging zoonotic and foodborne diseases; know and apply the basic principles and methods for case/outbreak investigation; be able to produce an informative and clear report to be used in public health education.

Time period and host country: 24–29 June 2002, Beirut, Lebanon

A.2 Advanced training course on hazard analysis critical control points systems (HACCP): concepts, applications, verifications and audit

Learning objectives: to refresh knowledge on HACCP principles, practices and applications in the production and processing of food of animal origin; provide knowledge and skills on designing, drafting and implementing of HACCP operating procedures; provide knowledge on HACCP system verification and auditing.

Time period and host country: 24 February–1 March 2003, Athens, Greece

B. National training activities

B.1 National Training Course on Human and Animal Brucellosis Prevention, Surveillance and Control, 11–16 May 2002, Cairo, Egypt

B.2 National Training Course on Intersectoral Brucellosis Epidemiological Surveillance, 13–17 October 2002, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

B.3 National training course on intersectoral brucellosis epidemiological surveillance, 2003, Kuwait

B.4 National training course on salmonellosis and zoonotic foodborne disease intersectoral epidemiological surveillance, 2003, Beirut, Lebanon

B.5 National upgraded training course on intersectoral brucellosis epidemiological surveillance, 2003, Turkey

C. Joint activities with other international organizations

C.1 Joint IAMZ/University of Navarra/MZCP International Seminar on Human and Animal Brucellosis Control and Laboratory Diagnosis

Objective: to provide updated knowledge and discuss the advantages and inconveniences of the diagnostic and disease control methodologies in human and animal brucellosis; deal with the theoretical aspects of brucellosis; provide practical demonstrations and practice in the human and animal brucellosis laboratory diagnosis procedures.

Time period and host country: 16–20 September 2002, Pamplona, Spain

C.2 WHO/MZCP Consultation on Food Safety Regulations and International Trade of animals and Animal Products (with the participation of WHO/HQ, WHO/EMRO, FAO, OIE EU, WTO, Codex Alimentarius Commission)

Goal: to acquaint on the public health requirements for food safety and bio-security in the international trade of animals and their products.

Objective: to provide support to member countries for upgrading hygiene and quality control in food production to meet international standards.

Time period and host country: October 2003, Athens, Greece