



International Scientific Working Group

**ISWG statement on the outbreak of influenza A H1N1 Affecting Casings Trade
– Issued May 22nd 2009**

The outbreak of the influenza A H1N1 virus, in North America and now present in many other countries, has caused considerable disruption in the movement of casings from North American countries to China and some other countries. China has closed the border to all pork, including casings, which either originate or pass through US states, Canada (state of Alberta) and Mexico. These countries or states have confirmed cases of influenza A H1N1 in humans.

The different national and regional associations of the casing industry have been working urgently on this issue, contacting competent authorities and international organizations such as the OIE and WHO, with respect to the safety of hog casings.

Incorrect reports from the media, referring to this outbreak as “swine flu”, suggested that this disease originated from animals. However, at present there is no evidence to support this suggestion, although researchers have found that this new strain contains genetic information which is also present in avian flu, swine flu and other human flu strains.

As a result, the FAO, WHO, WTO and OIE have issued a joint statement emphasizing the safety of pork products:

Four global organizations stated on 2 May 2009 that pork products handled in accordance with hygienic practices are not a source of infection.

The following statement was issued jointly on 2 May 2009 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization.

In light of the spread of influenza A/H1N1, and the rising concerns about the possibility of this virus being found in pigs and the safety of pork and pork products, we stress that pork and pork products, handled in accordance with good hygienic practices recommended by the WHO, FAO, Codex Alimentarius Commission and the OIE, will not be a source of infection.

To date there is no evidence that the virus is transmitted by food. There is currently therefore no justification in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Code for the imposition of trade measures on the importation of pigs or their products.

However it is important that Veterinary Authorities should collaborate with human health counterparts to monitor pig herds for any signs of unusual illness with suspected linkages to human cases of A/H1N1 influenza.

This statement was reaffirmed on May 7th by the same global organizations and so far no evidence has been brought forward to amend its contents.



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All casings handled by the global casing industry originate from animals that have passed ante and post mortem inspection during the slaughtering process and are deemed fit for human consumption.

In addition, validated HACCP systems are implemented by the casing industry, including clear hygienic handling requirements and having the correct amount of salt as a Critical Control Point for the preservation of processed casings.

The ISWG has dedicated several studies to the inactivation of different viruses (FMD, CSF) through the usage of salt as preservative of casings at different temperatures. Extrapolating information from available literature on avian influenza and swine influenza, it can be said that even if the influenza virus would be present in tissue its survivability in salted products is very short (Brown, 2009; Romijn 1989).

As a result the salting process of casings can be regarded as another clear safeguard against the spread of this virus, adding to the safety statement above.

In addition, an update on the influenza outbreak issued by the UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on May 6th confirms that the influenza virus is not found outside the respiratory tract and related lymph nodes (AQIS 1999, Bachmann, 1989). Therefore, it would be highly unlikely that influenza viruses could be transmitted in pork or pork products.

At this point the World Health Organization advises no restriction on international travel of persons or closure of borders.

We continue to follow this outbreak on a daily basis and will keep members up to date on any new information about this influenza outbreak and its impact on humans and the casing industry.

Note: all reports and scientific papers referred to in this statement are made available as full-text documents on the website of the natural casing associations.

References

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