



TEXAS' FOREIGN ANIMAL DISEASE REPORTING NETWORK



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Did you know that veterinarians from the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) are on-call 24/7 to respond to or answer questions from the public and veterinary practitioners related to after-hours foreign and emerging disease situations? TAHC and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarians take one-week rotations answering those after-hours calls year-round. If you call the TAHC Austin office at 800/550-8242 after-hours, it will roll you over to a USDA-certified foreign animal disease (FAD) diagnostician (FADD). Although we also get questions such as “How do I get a squirrel out of my attic?” or “Can I bring you the stray dog I just found on my back porch?,” we regularly receive questions that generate an investigation by one of our veterinary staff on short notice. Our staff performs approximately 50 investigations per year related to unusual disease reports.

The goal is to respond the same day if possible or, if not, within 24 hours. You may wonder what criterion is used to determine if a visit by a FADD is necessary. Even our experienced veterinarians who have been on many investigations and have possibly seen such FADs as foot-and-mouth or exotic Newcastle disease through their Plum Island training (or actual responses) are not expected to make a quick or definitive diagnosis in every case. So how do they know what to do? First and foremost, our veterinarians stay current on emerging conditions and the presence of known significant disease events worldwide. Secondly, our veterinarians are aware of the five specific situations that should always generate a red flag for any veterinary practitioner, whether in private practice or public service. Those conditions are reports of: (1) sudden unexplained death loss in a herd or flock; (2) severe illness affecting a high percentage of animals; (3) blistering (vesicles) around an animal's mouth, nose, hoof or teats; (4) unusual ticks or maggots; and (5) staggering, falling or

other CNS-type disorders.

I share this with you so that you don't worry about how to make the correct FAD diagnosis. You are not expected to always make a definitive diagnosis. Just be aware of the situations that trigger the FAD warning light, and give us a call so that we can discuss or help. We do, however, receive a number of calls that are obviously management-related or a domestic disease situation. In those cases, we are very cognizant not to interfere with the normal client-patient relationship with the caller's private veterinarian. The first question we always ask folks reporting a situation is “Have you talked to your veterinarian about this?” Our next step would be to call you, if possible, to compare notes and determine the next course of action.

A recent example of a call that generated an actual response was the report that a group of hogs brought in without health certificates from another state were displaying flu-like symptoms, were not under any veterinary care and were en route to a major sales event. The report triggered our sensors because there was illegal entry into the state and because we currently have an emerging disease situation with the H3N2 variant of influenza in hogs in certain parts of the U.S. Although this condition has not been reported in Texas to date, everyone knows how mobile the stock show population of animals can be. This H3N2 variant of flu is also implicated in swine-to-human transmission. As I am sure you know, the interface of humans, swine and poultry is where most new flu virus varieties begin.

As it turned out, the hogs were fine, but I wanted to share an example of a call we took and responded to over a recent major holiday weekend to help investigate not only an emerging animal disease situation but also to partner with the public health veterinary community. One world health in action!

Speaking of the H3N2v virus, I am one of four state veterinarians involved in a national working group charged with

creating messaging and protocols if hogs attending a stock show become ill while there. Don't get this confused with the H1N1 variety that popped up in 2009. In that case, it appeared sick people were infecting the hogs, while the current H3N2v situation appears to implicate spread of the virus from hogs to people. In both cases, the major issue for public health officials was the potential establishment of a virus that could easily be transmitted and sustained between people.

From the animal health perspective, the major issues are an emerging disease situation with limited treatment options and the potential loss of marketability or consumer confidence for pork. It is TAHC's role to not only prevent and respond to animal disease but also to support marketability of products through the release of science-based information. This situation did not change the fact that U.S. pork is safe to eat, and we don't want folks to get confused about that. Hopefully the working group soon will have available information about H3N2v that can be used by producers, stock show officials, their veterinarians and state animal health officials.

Finally, don't hesitate to call the TAHC regional office closest to your practice or the Austin office if you have any questions or concerns related to after-hours disease situations. We will answer the phone any time. If you are a stock show veterinarian, it is our goal for a TAHC regional veterinarian to meet with you and the stock show management in 2013 prior to your show to discuss this and other disease situations that might occur at your event. We are here to serve you and your clients. We know veterinary practitioners are the first line of defense for disease reporting, and we want you to be comfortable calling us at any time, day or night, about unusual situations. There are no dumb questions. [TV](#)