

## Interlab Collaboration: Swine Flu [Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza

The swine flu pandemic is another excellent example where public sector science organisations have brigaded their skills, expertise and facilities to address a major public health issue

The **Health Protection Agency** (HPA) was at the forefront of the response to the initial stages of the swine flu pandemic in the UK and as part of this provided a wealth of support and information to the medical profession, schools and households. The Agency immediately put updated information on its website giving the international picture and pre-developed infection control advice. Throughout the “containment phase”, the HPA continually provided information as the pandemic developed – initially travel advice, information for travelers returning from affected areas, information on anti-virals and subsequently guidance for particular at-risk groups such as pregnant women and advice for schools and other institutions as well as providing daily media updates. The Agency’s local and regional teams constantly gathered data, provided surveillance and worked with the NHS, through Flu Response Centres, to provide advice and support to primary care health staff responding to individual cases and schools. The Agency’s national experts focused on learning more about the virus providing much of the science behind developing the vaccine and continuous information and advice to government and other advisory bodies.

Given the very close relationship between human and animal health, particularly in the influenza field, veterinary scientists at the **Veterinary Laboratories Agency** (VLA) worked closely with public health counterparts at the HPA and globally as an international reference centre for influenza. VLA provided advice, reagents, test protocols and guidance to the HPA, facilitating a rapid laboratory response capability, as well as to the WHO influenza network of laboratories. An important project as part of the HPA/VLA partnership has involved carrying out urgent efficacy studies of a human vaccine using ferrets as an animal model.

Drawing on complementary skills in its Interlab Forum partners, the HPA coordinated a regional training programme to provide support should their diagnostic testing capacity become stretched. For example HPA in Cambridge trained scientists at the **Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture** (Cefas); and HPA in Southampton and Bristol trained scientists at respective locations at the **Defence Science and Technology Laboratory** (dstl). Also, the VLA high volume testing capability was made available should it be required.

By working together Interlab partners ensured that public money was well spent in the protection of both public and animal health.