

Terms of Reference for WHO H5 Reference Laboratories

In 2004, the WHO H5 Reference Laboratory Network was established, as an *ad hoc* component of the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network (GISN)¹, in response to the public health needs arising from avian influenza A(H5N1) infection in humans and influenza pandemic preparedness. The laboratories involved to date² include the four WHO Collaborating Centres for Reference and Research on Influenza, the WHO Collaborating Centre for Studies on the Ecology of Influenza in Animals and other laboratories with internationally recognized expertise in avian influenza.

The addition of new laboratories to the Network is based on an overall assessment of global public health needs, the ability of candidate laboratories to fulfil the Terms of Reference listed below, and, in particular, the added value that inclusion of candidate laboratories would bring to the Network.

Membership in the WHO H5 Reference Laboratory Network is *ad hoc* and will be reviewed periodically to ensure the Network's optimum effectiveness in meeting emerging public health risks.

Terms of Reference for WHO H5 Reference Laboratories:

In coordination with the WHO Global Influenza Programme(GIP):

1. Conduct the collection of specimens and/or virus isolates of A(H5N1), and other influenza subtypes with the potential to cause human infections, from humans and animals from sources worldwide, isolate viruses and make the viruses freely available to WHO laboratories involved in the selection and development of pre-pandemic and pandemic candidate vaccine viruses; have full access to Biosafety Level 3 laboratory facilities and separate facilities for human and animal influenza virus work;
2. Provide to WHO timely surveillance data and other information of public health significance, particularly from local and neighbouring geographical regions;
3. Conduct complete antigenic and genetic analysis of A(H5N1) and other subtypes of influenza viruses with the potential to cause human infections, perform serological studies and provide analysis results to laboratories contributing the specimens and/or virus isolates and to WHO GIP in a timely manner;
4. Assist WHO to evaluate its strategy and methods for the global surveillance and diagnosis of A(H5N1) and other subtypes of influenza viruses with the potential to cause human infections, including the development and revision of relevant recommendations, guidelines and other documents;
5. Participate in the WHO process to select, develop and distribute candidate vaccine viruses of A(H5N1) and other novel influenza subtypes;
6. Develop and distribute to GISN members and other national influenza reference laboratories laboratory diagnostic reagents for circulating A(H5N1) and other subtypes of influenza with the potential to cause human infections;
7. Monitor antiviral susceptibility of emerging A(H5N1) and other subtypes of animal influenza viruses causing human infections, and provide regular and timely reports to WHO GIP; and
8. Provide expertise and laboratory support, including training, to WHO Member States, especially to countries with outbreaks of avian influenza A(H5N1) or other subtype with the potential to cause human infections.

¹ WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/surveillance/en/index.html>

² WHO H5 Reference Laboratories: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/guidelines/referencelabs/en/index.html