PRESS STATEMENT
5th International One Health Congress
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Saskatoon, Canada

Can we predict major disease outbreaks?

(Saskatoon, Canada – 25 June 2018) The current Ebola outbreak in DR Congo, the emergence of Nipah virus in India, of Lassa virus in Nigeria and the continued threat of a pandemic flu outbreak are a clear warning that effective preparedness and response strategies must be developed and implemented, especially in high risk areas of the world. Issued at the end of a four-day conference on One Health organized by the One Health Platform and the University of Saskatchewan, this plea reflects a consensus that new outbreaks of infectious diseases that spill over from the animal world to the human population are just a question of time.

“We are not able to predict disease outbreaks,” says Prof. Ab Osterhaus, chair of the One Health Platform and the 5th International One Health Congress in his concluding remarks. “Infectious diseases will continue to emerge. Preparedness and response plans are therefore ever so important. To enhance preparedness, we need to continue to invest in creating a repository of microbial agents, while focusing on a functional analysis of virus families, such as the Orthomyxoviridae (influenza) and Coronaviridae (SARS, MERS), since some virus types are more prone to causing considerable disease than others.” Pandemic preparedness plans exist in different countries, but whether their implementation is achievable, remains unknown. Most countries even do not have such contingency plans. “Some of the infectious agents we discussed during the congress could potentially be used as bioweapons, which clearly adds to the importance of preparedness. At the same time, we need to strengthen the ties between zoonotic experts and policy makers in the field of disaster risk reduction”, said Osterhaus.

The One Health community expressed urgent concerns about growing antivaccine sentiments. “We should not forget the benefits vaccination has brought to mankind”, warned Prof. Osterhaus. “The choice to not vaccinate has very real and very serious consequences. Incredibly, it is causing the resurgence of diseases long thought to be under control or eradicated, like smallpox, polio, measles and whooping cough. There are no factually acceptable excuses for denying children vaccines.” One Health community unanimously accepted the responsibility to actively communicate about the necessity to vaccinate, based on solid scientific evidence.

A second concern voiced at the 5th International One Health Congress revolves around the paradox where the international community heavily invests in providing medical equipment and powerful medicines to hospital facilities in underprivileged communities, while the same facilities are confronted with a lack of access to clean water. Clean water is the cornerstone of...
sanitation and hygiene, and can be made available sustainably at a relatively low cost. The One Health community therefore urgently calls upon all responsible national and international implementing agencies to develop a strategy to provide access clean water in healthcare settings everywhere.

“It is important to realize that One Health can be made operational,” concluded Osterhaus, “as demonstrated by several inspiring lectures at the 5th International One Health Congress. The “One Health, One Caribbean, One Love” project, for example, forged a network of One Health leaders across 12 Caribbean countries which managed to solve real problems by involving all different sectors in a bottom up approach.” The One Health community now commits to implementing similar projects across the globe to address priority issues at the interface between human health, agriculture and the environment.

About One Health and the 5th International One Health Congress

The interlinked health of humans, animals and their environment a concept called “One Health”, has many ramifications that extend beyond the traditional concepts of “well-being. One Health problems are often complex and their solutions require the collaborative efforts of several disciplines. The meeting was organized by the One Health Platform, the University of Saskatchewan and our African partners: the Southern African Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillance (SACIDS), One Health CDC Kenya and the One Health Central and Eastern Africa (OHCEA).
The 5th International One Health Congress is part of a series of biennially organized congresses. The 6th edition will be held in 2020 in Edinburgh, Scotland.
More information http://www.onehealthcongress.com

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