Information Technology Plays Its Part

Information technology systems support the NAHLN vision by providing electronic interconnectivity between diagnostic-sample collectors, NAHLN laboratories, and national databases. By utilizing data and messaging standards established by veterinary medical and public-health agencies, accurate and consistent diagnostic information is quickly and securely transmitted, aggregated, and available for decisionmakers and analysts.

Train the Trainer

A “train the trainer” program has been developed by NVSL and implemented to increase the number of laboratories with personnel trained to conduct the assays for diagnosing AI, END, CSF, and FMD. This program not only has increased the number of laboratory personnel prepared to respond to a national animal-health emergency but has also provided the United States with a cadre of trainers available to teach others when needed. The successful implementation of this program is a significant step for the NAHLN in achieving its goals of sufficient diagnostic capability and capacity to address an animal-health emergency.

Vision Statement

The NAHLN is the nationwide model for effective diagnostic networks that respond quickly and efficiently and communicate diagnostic outcomes to decisionmakers. The NAHLN is organized and supported so that it has the capacity to respond to animal-disease outbreaks nationwide.

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Networking these resources provides an extensive infrastructure of facilities, equipment, and personnel that are geographically accessible no matter where disease strikes. The laboratories have the capability and capacity to conduct nationwide surveillance testing for the early detection of an animal disease outbreak. They are able to test large numbers of samples rapidly during an outbreak and to demonstrate freedom from disease after eradication.

The NAHLN is a cooperative effort between two USDA agencies—the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians. It is a multifaceted network comprised of sets of laboratories that focus on different diseases using common testing methods and software platforms to process diagnostic requests and share information.

Personnel in the NAHLN laboratories are approved to conduct screening tests to detect various animal diseases, including avian influenza (AI), exotic Newcastle disease (END), bovine spongiform encephalopathy, chronic wasting disease, scrapie, classical swine fever (CSF), and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), and vesicular stomatitis.

The NAHLN also contributes to wider societal goals, such as:

- Protecting human health by decreasing the risk of zoonotic diseases (those that can affect animals and humans);
- Protecting animal health to decrease environmental risk and negative economic impact to producers;
- Protecting the health of domestic and wild animals by lessening the risk of disease transmission between wildlife and livestock;
- Increasing consumer confidence in the Nation’s food supply, and
- Maintaining confidence and positive relationships among global trading partners.

Key elements of the NAHLN system include increased and more flexible capacity for laboratory services, increased and more flexible capacity for laboratory services nationwide; providing laboratory data to meet epidemiologic and disease-reporting needs; maintaining the capacity and capability to provide laboratory services in support of responses to foreign animal-disease outbreaks or other adverse animal-health events; and focus on diseases of livestock (exotic, zoonotic, and emerging diseases), while including diseases of nonlivestock species.