



Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

NATIONAL ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY NETWORK

NAHLN Emergency Preparedness

The National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) is an important part of our country's emergency preparedness and response system. The network consists of State, university, and Federal veterinary diagnostic laboratories. NAHLN laboratories use standardized, rapid diagnostic techniques and a secure communications system. They have highly trained personnel, modern equipment, and safe facilities. They also follow quality standards, practice emergency preparedness by reviewing adverse animal health scenarios, complete proficiency testing successfully, and undergo a thorough review and approval process before joining NAHLN. Together, the network laboratories ensure that diagnostic facilities, equipment, and personnel are readily available no matter where in the country an animal disease strikes.

NAHLN laboratories are able to conduct nationwide surveillance testing to detect animal diseases anywhere in our country. If a disease outbreak happens, the laboratories can quickly test large numbers of samples and demonstrate freedom from disease after the outbreak has been eradicated.

Continuing To Increase Preparedness

On an ongoing basis, NAHLN works with other Federal and State partners on projects to enhance our country's diagnostic infrastructure and address animal health needs. Examples of these projects include developing, improving, and validating several tests for foot-and-mouth disease. NAHLN also collaborated with the Institute for Infectious Animal Diseases (IIAD) to develop laboratory operations policies to be followed during disease outbreaks. The IIAD then led a series of workshops to discuss and improve agricultural screening tools and test methods.

One of the priorities for NAHLN is to develop and use tools that improve network function. In collaboration with NAHLN, IIAD created software tools to estimate laboratory capacity in NAHLN laboratories. NAHLN has also worked to establish a secure portal for electronic communications between laboratories. This allows the network to share useful documents and information such as standard operating procedures, proficiency tests, laboratory directories, test method performance, meeting notes, training resources, and collaboration tools in one place.

Exercises and Drills

Exercises and drills are essential to keep laboratories prepared for emergencies. The NAHLN Exercises and Drills Working Group developed laboratory content, scenarios, and questions for tabletop training exercises across the network. For example, during Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, the working group conducted drills with NAHLN members to test the network's readiness to respond in case the USDA's Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at Plum Island, NY, was affected by the storms.

The goal with these efforts is to improve participants' understanding and skills on individual laboratory tests and tools, as well as how to collaborate seamlessly in an emergency.

Working Together

NAHLN is a member of the Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks (ICLN), a cross-agency/cross-network group that collaborates for awareness and emergency response. Other members include representatives from the Laboratory Response Network, the Food Emergency Response Network, the National Plant Diagnostic Network, and laboratory networks within the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. ICLN routinely runs exercises to offer the many different networks an opportunity to work together, both in lead roles and in supporting roles.

National Animal Health Laboratory Network

NAHLN, a State and Federal partnership to safeguard animal health

Phone: (515) 337-7731

Email: NAHLN@aphis.usda.gov

Web site: www.aphis.usda.gov/nahln

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

This publication supersedes APHIS 91-95-011, "NAHLN Tabletop Exercise Series," which was published in October 2011.

Issued September 2014 • APHIS 91-05-016