

Partnerships to prevent the spread of African horse sickness
in the Asia-Pacific region



The first outbreak of African horse sickness (AHS) in the Asia-Pacific region for more than 50 years in February 2020 caused the OIE, the International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE), local partners and international experts to form a partnership to prevent the deadly disease’s spread from Thailand.

Quick reaction to contain the outbreak

With a very high mortality rate amongst horses in Thailand, there were concerns about the spread of the disease to neighbouring countries, so the OIE acted swiftly to provide advice to its members across the Asia-Pacific region. One of the actions taken was to organise a series of webinars featuring international experts, with speakers, including representatives of ICWE, from the international animal welfare NGOs Brooke, The Donkey Sanctuary, SPANA and World Horse Welfare.

Engaging with horse owners on the ground

One of these neighbouring countries is Cambodia, which is home to a modest equine leisure industry and approximately 30,000 working ponies that support the livelihoods of households throughout the country. Preparedness to prevent the spread of AHS to the country is therefore imperative.



With the support of the Government Department of Animal Health and Production (GDAHP), the local organisation Cambodia Pony Welfare Organisation (CPWO) were able to work with even remote communities to raise awareness on the disease and support practical prevention measures.

In April, CPWO travelled from Phnom Penh to the country's provinces that border Thailand, with support from World Horse Welfare. Once at Banteaymeanchey, Battambang and Siem Reap, they helped over 200 ponies and their families by assisting with covering stables with shade netting impregnated with insecticide, as well as providing clear messaging on AHS symptoms for owners to watch out for. Posters developed by ICWE were displayed in these communities and made available to all countries in the region.

This collaborative work highlights how effective field-based projects can be with working partnerships from the international to the local level.

The vital importance of healthy working equids

Working equids are woven into the fabric of countries around the world. It is estimated that over 100 million working equids support the livelihoods of 600 million people and play an important – but often unrecognised - role in the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (e.g. water provision, food security, income generation).

Chapter 7.12 on the welfare of working equids within the OIE's *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* raises awareness of key health and welfare considerations from individual to population level. Its reference and application will help to strengthen the systems that protect these animals and increase the resilience of those that rely upon them.

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