RIFT VALLEY FEVER: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR EUROPE?

Chiara Pinoni, Barbara Bonfini, Fabrizia Valleriani, Laura Ambrogi, Angela Taraschi, Francesca Rosso, Federica Monaco, Koos Coetzer, Giovanni Savini
European Reference Laboratory for Rift Valley Fever, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise (IZSAM), Teramo, Italy

Rift Valley fever (RVF) is a vector-borne disease transmitted to animals and humans by a wide range of mosquito species. To date, no RVF outbreaks in humans or animals have ever been reported in Europe. However, the virus is circulating in countries adjacent to European Union and the risk of its introduction into EU through infected vectors, though low, cannot be ruled out. This concern prompted EU authorities to appoint a reference laboratory (EURL). The main objective behind this designation is to reinforce preparedness, improve early detection capabilities, and enhance response capacities among Member States. These goals are fundamental components for ensuring a successful response to potential threats. In its inaugural year, the EURL successfully launched its website, organized the inaugural proficiency test and Annual meeting, and actively facilitated numerous webinars and training courses in collaboration with International organizations like EUFMD, FAO, WOAH, and national authorities like the Ministry of Health. The website was a significant milestone in enhancing communication and collaboration among National Reference Laboratories (NRLs) involved in the diagnosis of RVF. The website serves as a central hub for disseminating vital information related to diagnostic procedures, standard operating procedures, protocols, guidelines, validation processes, proficiency test (PT) results, and other pertinent details regarding EURL activities. It plays a crucial role in supporting NRLs in their efforts to effectively diagnose and manage Rift Valley Fever, ultimately contributing to the prevention and control of the disease. The successful organization of the first RVF EURL PT marks significant advancements in supporting the diagnostic capabilities of NRLs and third countries in managing RVF. Additionally, the annual meeting with NRLs held in Teramo, along with collaborations with ERFAN WOAH, the Italian Ministry of Health, FAO, and EUFMD demonstrates a proactive approach to disseminating scientific and technical knowledge and fostering collaboration within the global community. Overall, these initiatives reflect a concerted effort to strengthen RVF diagnostic capacities, enhance scientific understanding, and promote collaborative approaches to RVF management on a global scale.