



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association Ltd

## **HKVA VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH SUB-COMMITTEE**

### **Statement on Japanese Encephalitis**

Japanese encephalitis (JE) is a mosquito-borne viral disease of humans and animals. Water birds, particularly Ardeid birds (eg. herons and egrets), are the main reservoir and amplifying hosts for the virus. Pigs may be clinically affected and become amplifying hosts. Infected pregnant sows may develop reproductive problems such as abortion, still birth or weak piglets at term. Clinical encephalitis is rarely seen in piglets up to six months old. Horses and humans may also be infected and develop severe or fatal encephalitis. Subclinical infections may occur in other animal species, including dogs, cats, rodents and cattle.

Mosquitoes such as *Culex tritaeniorhynchus* and *Culex gelidus*, which breed in locations where fresh water collects, are present all over Hong Kong and known to be important vectors in the transmission of JE virus.

In Hong Kong, control of mosquitoes (*Culex spp.*) plays a significant role in controlling JE infection in humans. All potential breeding grounds for mosquitoes must be eliminated. People living close to potential breeding or harbouring grounds for mosquitoes such as slopes with tall vegetation, ditches and deserted cultivated land should install mosquito repulsion devices to prevent the mosquitoes getting access to their living quarters. Pig farmers, of course, should instigate preventative measures in their pig sheds. The mosquitoes can be killed by various means including direct spraying of insecticides. However, risk assessment should be conducted before application is carried out in a public area as most chemical insecticides are hazardous to human, animals and the environment.

Pig farmers should monitor their pigs for inexplicable reproductive failure and immediately seek veterinary help from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation.

Although vaccination of pigs against JE can prevent pigs from developing reproductive failure, it cannot eliminate human infection as wild water birds such as herons and egrets can act as a major reservoir for the virus. The Government should be cautious when communicating to the public about pig vaccination. The general public should not be misled to think that vaccination of pigs against JE can help prevent human infection.

This statement is provided by the HKVA - VPH Subcommittee, if any further information is required, please contact Secretary

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