

FMD ANTIGEN BANKS PROVE THEIR WORTH AGAIN

Merial vaccines fighting largest global FMD outbreak for 10 years



Two of Merial's international foot-and-mouth disease antigen banks were called into action during the holiday period. Over 1 million doses were formulated, filled, quality checked and shipped from the U.K. to Zambia and South Korea between Dec 22nd and Dec 30th.

Merial's Vaccine Centre at Pirbright, Surrey has long been the home to a number of important stores of FMD antigens. Antigens are the active ingredients of vaccines and ranges of them are held in banks in readiness at ultra-cold temperatures on behalf of various governments. Each one is tailored to the specific requirements of its owner, as FMD strains evolve and vary around the world. Should an outbreak occur, and the decision to vaccinate taken, then the banks allow Merial to swing into action instantly and quickly turn antigens into finished products.

Since FMD was first diagnosed on a pig farm in Andong city, South Korea, on 29 November, over 1.4 million animals have been culled, some 10% of the national stock. On 22nd December, the Korean government took the decision to vaccinate in order to control the spread of disease and reduce further slaughter.

Said Philippe Dubourget, FMD operations Director for Merial's Veterinary Public Health division at Lyon: "Having a dedicated bank meant Merial supplied 1.2 million doses to South Korea within six working days from orders being placed. Without a bank, it could easily have been four months or even longer. FMD is the most infectious

animal virus we know of, it has the potential to cause huge economic turmoil and devastate farming communities, so time is precious and antigen banks buy their owners time.”

Dr Jef Hammond, Head of the world-renowned FMD Reference Laboratory at the UK’s Institute for Animal Health, referred to antigen banks “as a vital part of any contingency planning for FMD outbreaks. They offer a flexible approach in which to provide rapid supplies of vaccine that best match the field situation.”

While the Zambia mobilisation, which involved the EU antigen bank, was on a much smaller scale , it contributed to complicating life at Pirbright. “It was certainly a busy end to the year” said Merial Pirbright Site Director, Dr Tim Doel. “Since South Korea triggered its bank twice over the period, we actually had three mobilisations to deal with.

“At this time of the year, our main focus is carrying out the stringent validation work demanded to ensure we continue to meet official GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) standards. So already it was by no means a quiet period. Operations were taking place during a period of heavy snow, which hampered not only staff getting in but also our usual channels for getting vaccine out. So we had our work cut out but, I am pleased to say, we met all our obligations.”

The two shipments of Merial’s high potency AFTOPOR® vaccines for Korea arrived under cold chain conditions at Incheon airport on 26th December and 2nd January. They were instantly shipped to the field as part of the campaign to reduce the transmission of FMD to further farms. This does not mean Merial Pirbright’s work is over, a further 2.5 million doses have already been manufactured and delivered, and production is underway for even more millions of doses.

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