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Tularemia wet-lab exercise

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Aims:

- 1) compare and exchange working knowledge of tularemia disease in endemic countries and,
- 2) improve the connection among the network of laboratories charged with the responsibility to detect, assess and confirm tularemia disease in humans, animals and its presence in the environment,
- 3) opportunity to examine different diagnostic techniques and algorithms.

Methods: Since 2000, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been working with an advisory group of tularemia experts to develop a comprehensive tularemia guidance (www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/deliberate/WHO_CDS_EPR_2007_7/en) and organizing periodic reviews and updates. As an outcome of these activities, it was proposed that a tularemia wet-lab exercise, jointly hosted by WHO and by tularemia expert laboratories, would be of value. Therefore, as an initiative of the Tularemia International Society (TULARINS), FOI (Swedish Defence Research Agency) with support from the World Health Organization hosted a comparative exercise workshop on the detection of *Francisella tularensis* and the diagnosis of tularemia. The focus of the workshop was to perform molecular, culture and serology methods for the detection of *F. tularensis* and the clinical diagnosis of human specimens. Each participating laboratory had the opportunity to compare and validate their methods using unknown samples provided at the workshop. There were also demonstrations of other techniques as determined by the participants request.

Conclusions: This exercise was very successful in bringing together 8 countries to compare and evaluate their diagnostic tests for the detection of *F. tularensis* and related organisms.

As the exercise workshop format requires hands-on participation, only a limited number of teams may be hosted at any one time. Therefore, a series of workshops may be organized on a continual basis under the auspices of various volunteer hosting sites in order to make the opportunity available to all qualified laboratory that wishes to participate.