

***How lessons learned from MERS have benefitted  
the response to COVID-19 in the United Arab Emirates***

The emergence of MERS in the Arabian Peninsula some years ago has paved the way to a structured One Health collaboration in the region. The experience gained over these years contributes in many ways to address the current COVID-19 pandemic in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In 2013, the [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome](#) (MERS), a severe respiratory disease in humans that was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012, was detected in the UAE. Dealing with this emerging disease put the national emergency response system to the test. Since then, the country has been working intensively to further enhance its prevention, preparedness and response capacities in line with the One Health approach.



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In UAE, the human and animal health sectors have been collaborating for several years now: this has facilitated the coordination from the early stage of the current COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the national government plan aims to increase the number of COVID-19 tests, a key step for the early detection of infected people. Collective efforts between public health and veterinary laboratories contributed to improve the overall capacity to implement the national strategy.

A national committee has been set up with the participation of all the laboratories involved in COVID-19 testing, including national veterinary laboratories. The committee holds regular remote meetings to discuss challenges as well as to provide solutions and recommendations. In order to facilitate a timely report of the results, the information management systems of the veterinary laboratories and public health laboratories have been linked to each other, thereby ensuring a quick and safe transfer of information.

The veterinary laboratory of Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA), which is the MERS national reference laboratory, was involved in this initiative from the onset of the COVID epidemic. ADAFSA experience in mass screening is being implemented to conduct over 2000 emergency tests for COVID-19 per day without having an impact on the routine diagnostic services. This is necessary to ensure the continuity of other essential activities. Even before the first case of COVID-19 was detected in the country, the veterinary laboratory had already developed and validated an in-house test method. Moreover, as an OIE Collaborating

Centre for quality management system, ADAFSA has been assisting the public health laboratories in method validation of new materials.

Thanks to the national One Health approach built in the recent years and implemented in the response to the current pandemic, the number of COVID-19 tests in UAE has recently reached the two million mark.



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**Related information:**

- [ADAFSA veterinary laboratory as part of COVID 19 emergency response](#)
- [OIE Guidance for Veterinary Laboratory Support to the Public Health Response for COVID-19](#)

■ May 2020