

# Terms of reference

## 'RAG-COVID Animals'

### Risk assessment of COVID-19 in animals in the context of the protection of Public Health

(DirRisk 2020/32 – V4 of 08/04/2020)

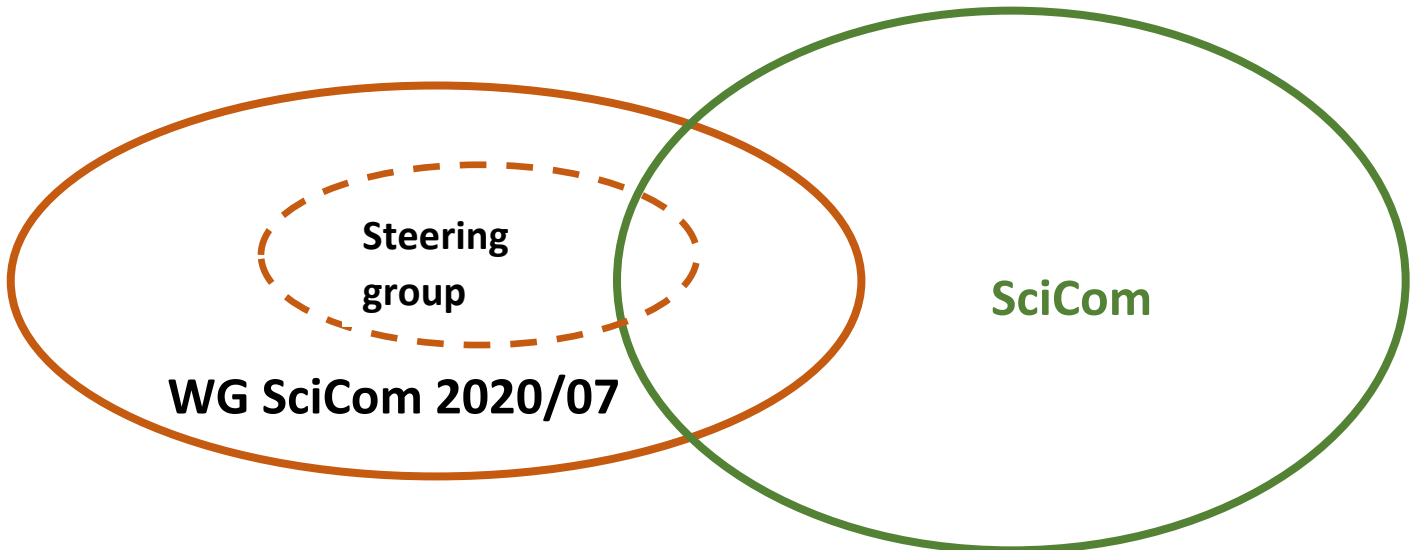
**COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT GROUP (RAG)**

**COVID-19 RISK MANAGEMENT GROUP (RMG)**

**COVID-19 SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE**

**RAG-COVID Animals\*:  
RISK ASSESSMENT OF  
COVID-19 IN ANIMALS**

**Independent SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE established by the FASFC (SciCom)**



\* **RAG-COVID Animals** = pre-existing working group of the SciCom in the context of the urgent opinion on COVID-19 in pets (SciCom file 2020/07), which was extended to include observers from the public

administration and members of Sciensano (notably to ensure both the coordination and the communication with the RAG), see below under “Composition of the ‘RAG COVID-Animals’”.

### **Objective:**

Under the mandate of the federal Risk Assessment Group COVID-19 in humans (RAG – contact person Sophie Quoilin/Sciensano), a Risk Assessment Group ‘Risk of COVID-19 in animals’ (**RAG-COVID Animals**) has been established in the context of the protection of Public Health. Marc Dispas, who is responsible for the Department of Veterinary Epidemiology at Sciensano has been appointed as representative of the RAG in the ‘RAG COVID-Animals’.

This Risk Assessment Group will provide support to the federal COVID-19 crisis Group (RAG/RMG/Scientific Committee COVID-19) regarding new information and knowledge on the **SARS-CoV2** in animals, which is constantly becoming available. **This will be done by replacing information in an appropriate context regarding the Public Health risks.**

The ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ has been established for an indefinite period as an extension of the pre-existing working group (SciCom file 2020/07) of the independent Scientific Committee established by the FASFC, which issued a provisional urgent opinion on the zoonotic risks of the SARS-CoV2 in pets on 22 March 2020.

### **Tasks of the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ risk assessment group**

1. Following up on the development of scientific knowledge (both in Belgium and internationally) on COVID-19 infection in animals (pets, livestock and wild animals), and this mainly with regards to Animal health and the risk of transmission of the SARS-CoV2 between animals and from humans to animals and vice versa.
2. Collecting all information on SARS-CoV2 infection/detection in animals in Belgium (taking into account the confidentiality of data).
3. Ensuring (according to possibilities) the follow-up and coordination of knowledge on the epidemiological development of COVID-19 infection in animals (pets, livestock and wild animals) in practice, both in Belgium and internationally.
4. Discussing issues that might arise regarding the role of animals in the control of COVID-19 in Belgium.

### **Output of the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ risk assessment group**

1. Providing recommendations and options for risk management.
2. Identifying risk-related questions to be submitted to the independent Scientific Committee established by the FASFC (SciCom) and preparing its opinions.
3. Reporting to the federal corona COVID-19 crisis group (Public Health) and to the authorities.
4. Preparing communication for the sector, the veterinarians and the public (e.g. by means of FAQs).
5. Proposal to shut down the RAG-COVID Animals risk assessment group at the end of its mandate.

## Means

To ensure smooth operation, the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ receives both administrative and scientific support from the Staff Direction for Risk Assessment of the FASFC (“DirRisk”, file manager). The ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ receives priority from the communication and translation departments of the FASFC and, if necessary, from other departments both within and outside the FASFC.

## Functioning and composition of the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ risk assessment group

At the time of its establishment, the composition of the RAG-COVID Animals coincides with the pre-existing working group of experts involved in the SciCom file 2020/07 - The zoonotic risk of the SARS-CoV2 virus in pets - Urgent opinion 04-2020). This working group will be extended to observers from various public administrations who have the profile of risk managers, risk communicators, experts or international representatives from Belgium, in such a way to create a quick and efficient information flow between administrations, international institutions and Sciensano.

For its daily operations, the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ relies on a limited **steering group**. This steering group meets on a regular basis (at least twice a month officially and maintains permanent and ad hoc contacts) on the priority issues related to Covid-19 in animals and, where appropriate, includes the members of the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ in these consultations.

The ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ risk assessment group meets on the initiative of its chairman. The functioning of the ‘RAG-COVID Animals’ complies with the provisions of the SciCom’s internal regulations and ethical code (regarding conflicts of interest statements).

## Composition of the ‘RAG COVID-Animals’

<b>Name</b> <b><u>(Steering group members are indicated in bold and are underlined)</u></b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Role in the risk assessment group</b>
<b><u>Etienne Thiry</u></b>	Professor, University of Liège – Virologist - Chairman of the SciCom	Chairman of the RAG COVID Animals Spokesperson (French)
<b><u>Jeroen Dewulf</u></b>	Professor, Ghent University - Epidemiologist – Member of the SciCom	Vice-Chairman RAG COVID Animals Spokesperson (Dutch)
Claude Saegerman	Professor, University of Liège – Epidemiologist	Member of the SciCom
Thierry van den Berg	Operational Director Sciensano – Virologist	Member of the SciCom
Nick De Regge	Expert, Sciensano – Virologist	Member of the SciCom
Niko Speybroek	Professor, UCL – Statistician	Member of the SciCom

<b><u>Hans Nauwynck</u></b>	Professor, Ghent University – Virologist	External expert
Daniel Desmecht	Professor, University of Liège – Pathologist	External expert
<b><u>Axel Mauroy</u></b>	FASFC: Expert ,Staff Direction for Risk Assessment	File manager / Secretary
Pieter Depoorter	FASFC : Expert, Staff Direction for Risk Assessment	File Manager / Secretary
Xavier Van Huffel	FASFC: Director, Staff Direction for Risk assessment	Coordination
<b><u>Jean-François Heymans</u></b>	FASFC : Director-General a.i. DG Control Policy, CVO of Belgium	Observer + general coordination (maintaining relations with the political and other authorities,...) + maintaining relations with the European and international CVOs.
Jozef Hooyberghe	FASFC : Director a.i. Direction of Animal Health and Safety of Animal Products	Observer + maintaining relations with veterinarians and the sector (+ providing support on legislation)
Valentine Clavier	FASFC: Expert, Direction of Animal Health and Safety of Animal Products	Observer + maintaining relations with veterinarians and the sector + providing support on legislation
Philippe Houdart	FASFC : Crisis manager (responsible for requesting urgent opinions from the SciCom)	Observer
<b><u>Herman Claeys</u></b>	FPS Public Health: Director of Animal Health (DG4) Belgian delegate to the OIE	Observer + providing support on legislation + maintaining relations with the FPS Public Health (veterinarians) and the OIE
Jean-Sébastien Walhin	FASFC: Director a.i. Communication Department	Observer + communication support
<b><u>Dispas Marc</u></b>	Sciensano: Animal health expert	Observer + representative of the RAG (reporting to the RAG, Sophie Quoilin)

## **INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE FASFC (SciCom)**

For the sake of completeness, the Scientific Committee established by the FASFC is also mentioned here. The Scientific Committee is an independent scientific advisory board which can provide support in the control of COVID-19 by issuing scientific opinions. These opinions are requested by the Chief Executive Officer of the FASFC, by the Minister or by the crisis manager. Opinions are issued within 48-72 hours (for urgent opinions) within one month (for rapid opinions) or within 3 tot 6 months (formal opinions) for

complex questions. The Scientific Committee may also deliver opinions on its own initiative. The opinions of the SciCom are prepared in a working group and validated during the plenary session. All of the scientific opinions are public and published on the website of the Scicom.

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