

Travel, Trade and Plant Pests – What the COVID19 Pandemic teaches us

Key messages from the IPPC Secretariat on plant health and COVID-19

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) is an inter-governmental treaty signed by 184 countries, aimed at protecting the world's plant resources from the spread and introduction of pests, and promoting safe trade. The Convention uses International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) as its main tool to achieve its goals, making it the sole global standard setting organisation for plant health.

Prevention is always better than cure!

It is an unfortunate coincidence that during the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) in 2020, the COVID-19 global outbreak is showing the world how adopting preventive measures is essential to secure countries from the introduction and spread of devastating human diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is proving that prevention is always better than cure, and this applies to the health of humans, animals and plants.

The COVID-19 global outbreak is showing the world how adopting preventive measures is essential to secure countries from the introduction and spread of devastating diseases. Science-based preventive actions, including quarantine measures, are indispensable to protect the health of people, animals and plants alike.



International travel and trade: viruses do not bring passports to cross borders, but plants and other regulated goods require phytosanitary certificates

Viruses and diseases do not take passports when moving from one country to another but are most often spread unintentionally by people and goods moving in trade. Promoting conscious and prudent behaviours among members of the public is essential to reach a common global goal and secure health at different levels. People moving around the globe may be an unintentional vehicle of infection, carrying viruses and plant diseases. With globalization and the resulting increase in international travel and trade, plant pests of different kinds are more likely to be moved across borders with consignments and travellers and spread these pests at alarming rates. The current COVID-19 outbreak is also showing us that the world must be extra careful with travel of people and be ready to tackle any emergency. In the area of plant health, we must also facilitate the safe trade of plants, plant products and other items, such as sea containers that can allow pests to be spread. Detection or quarantine are indispensable security measures to contain an epidemic - be it a human, animal or plant health emergency.



Protecting plant health is essential for food security, particularly in emergency situations

Plants are a primary source of income for nearly half of the global population and make up 80% of the food we eat. The current COVID-19 outbreak experience highlights the need to ensure that plants are protected from the ravages of plant pests. The trade of plants and plant products creates wealth and supports economic development in many countries of the world. However, one of the potential consequences of this global emergency is the possibility of disrupted trade, which could in turn compromise access to a safe and stable supply of food. This is why taking steps to ensure a safe supply of fresh food and protecting plants from pests is now more important than ever. While COVID-19 is affecting human health worldwide, plant pests and diseases continue to pose a threat to food production. It is particularly important at this time to not let down our guard and always remember that a threat to plant health is a threat to the health and prosperity of people, especially the most vulnerable. In this critical situation, we are all vulnerable and protecting plant health becomes vital for our own wellbeing. This is the noble goal for which the IPPC was created, as expressed by the IYPH slogan: "protecting plants, protecting life".

Pest outbreaks and economic losses: "Pay a little now or pay a lot more later"

Don't wait - act now to prevent pest outbreaks! In general, prevention costs less than treating and eradicating an outbreak. If infections or infestations and outbreaks affecting both human and plant health are not detected and controlled in time, the eradication of a disease can take several years and cost millions of dollars, if it can be contained at all.

Health is a global issue: the crucial role of the international community

Global coordination is essential to tackle COVID-19. It is time for the international community to act more decisively in a coordinated manner. When a virus like the Coronavirus has an outbreak in one country or a few distant territories, the international community must take notice and develop a rapid and coordinated response. Adopting divergent measures could be even more catastrophic for countries living in an emergency. Prevention, Preparedness, Public health, Political leadership and People are the key!

This is why it is important for countries to follow the IPPC International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures when setting their national phytosanitary measures, thus harmonizing measures at a global level. Sharing knowledge and best practices is essential to face global crises and combat common enemies.

Adopted from the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

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