



# ePhyto Factsheet #3

## What is an ePhyto?

**ePhyto** is short for "electronic phytosanitary certificate".

An ePhyto is the electronic version of the information contained in a phytosanitary certificate.

All the information contained in a paper phytosanitary certificate is also detailed in the ePhyto.

ePhytos can be exchanged electronically between countries or the data printed out into a paper-based phytosanitary certificate.

ePhytos should be produced in accordance with ISPM 12 and its Appendix 1. ePhytos contain phytosanitary data in XML format.

## What is XML?

**Extensible Markup Language (XML)** is an internationally recognised language used to produce documents in a format that is both human-readable and machine-readable.

XML is a textual data format that is standardized to allow communication between different computer systems and usability over the Internet.

XML is widely used and has come into common use for the interchange of data over the Internet.

## How do ePhytos compare with paper phytosanitary certificates?

The ePhyto is equivalent to the traditional paper-based phytosanitary certificate. The contents of an ePhyto can be directly related to the elements of a paper-based phytosanitary certificate.

### Comparison of paper and electronic certificates

Certificate type	Paper	Electronic
Phytosanitary certificate	Certificate data in hard copy, stamped and signed	Certificate data in XML format, authorized and encrypted and signed
Copy certificate	Photocopy or pdf of certificate	Printout or viewer (web or pdf) or Certificate data in XML format
Certified copy	Copy certificate stamped, dated and countersigned	Printout of certificate data, stamped, dated, countersigned, or Certificate data in XML format, re-encrypted

## Benefits of ePhytos

The use of a single global standard, ISPM 12:2011 (Phytosanitary Certificates), for electronic phytosanitary certification (ePhyto) provides a number of benefits, in comparison to paper-based phytosanitary certification, to both exporting and importing countries:

- reduce possibilities for fraudulent documentation
- reduce data entry and validation functions by NPPO staff
- improve security in transmission of certificate documentation
- improve planning for the arrival and clearance of plants and plant products at customs
- reduce delays in receiving replacement phytosanitary certificates
- maximize the investment by building on existing initiatives
- reduce ongoing and costly bilateral arrangements
- ability to link into the World Customs Organization "One Window" initiative and harmonize codes and processes

## What is an ePhyto system?

An **ePhyto system** is the IT system by which phytosanitary certificates are produced and exchanged electronically between NPPOs.

**ePhyto exchange** means the sending and receiving of ePhytos between two countries.

**Point-to-point exchange** is when the ePhyto exchange is directly between the exporting country and the importing country.

**Single point exchange** is the option when the ePhyto exchange between several exporting countries and several importing countries is through a single point (this has previously been referred to as a "hub").

Part of the ePhyto system may fit into a larger national system that also contains elements for listing importing country requirements, inspection records, planning, training, invoicing and reporting functions as the individual NPPO deems appropriate.

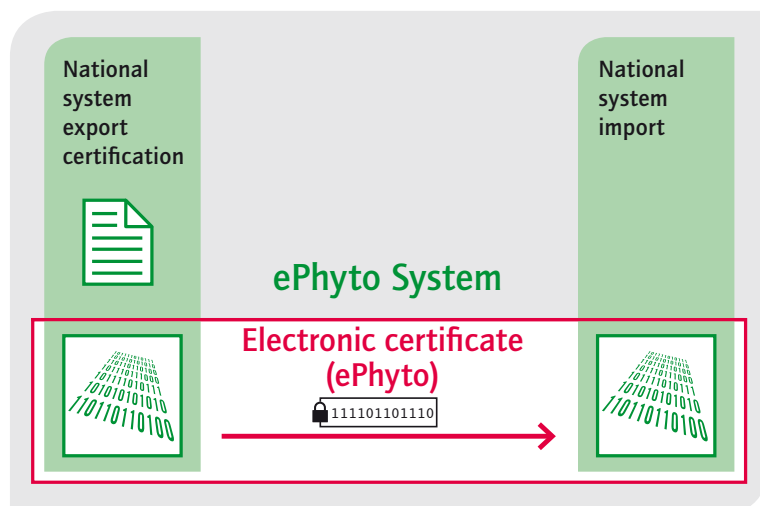
## Diagram of an ePhyto system

ePhyto systems are required by both the exporting country and the receiving/importing country.

In order to exchange ePhytos between NPPOs the ePhyto system needs to include the following elements according to the specifications in Appendix 1 of ISPM 12

- ◆ production of an XML message
- ◆ interface to exchange (eg. send, receive, revoke, replace etc) ePhytos

This is all illustrated in the following diagram:



## Background information

The IPPC website has a lot of information on the history of ePhyto development – use the links below to find out more information:

- [IPPC ePhyto – home page](#)
- [IPPC ePhyto – history and developments](#)
- [IPPC ePhyto – codes and schema](#)
- [ePhyto Steering Group Terms of Reference](#)

## ePhyto Steering Group

The IPPC ePhyto Steering Group was established by the 8th session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) to coordinate work on key components to further harmonize ePhyto and assist countries with their implementation of ePhyto.

## Contact us

### ePhyto Steering Group

International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)  
 Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy  
 Tel: +39 06 5705 4812 | Fax: +39 06 5705 4819  
 Email: [ippc@fao.org](mailto:ippc@fao.org) | Web: [www.ippc.int](http://www.ippc.int)