

EUROPEAN UNION INTERVENTION (DAY 2) OF GENEVA MEETING 7 - 9 November 2005

If spoken: I take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania align themselves with this statement.

Day 2 (8 November). Addressing the Global and Regional Dimensions of Avian Influenza and Human Pandemic Influenza

1. The EU recognise that if we are to tackle the threat of avian and human pandemic influenza effectively we will need to move forward in our actions at regional and global levels as well as at country level. The same principles of working collaboratively within a UN agency-led framework apply as for country initiatives.
2. The principles underlining this work are the need for a multisectoral approach and for effective co-ordination and accurate information-sharing within and between countries and with and between multinational and multilateral bodies. Today's meeting provides a good opportunity to assess the progress we have made against the work of the multilateral organisations and to discuss the principles and priorities of further actions.
3. Within the European Union, a harmonised approach to tackle Avian Influenza is ensured by Community legislation on disease notification and control, that is supplemented by European Commission implementing measures, that are adopted through well-established rapid decision-making mechanisms, involving the Member States in the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, by the national contingency plans against the disease that are in place in all Member States, and by the existing network of national laboratories co-ordinated by the Community Reference Laboratory.
4. In relation to the recent spread of disease in Central Asia, certain areas of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, further Community measures have been adopted including intensifying surveillance and mechanisms for early detection of disease in domestic poultry and wild birds, strengthening of bio-security measures in poultry farms and vaccination of zoo birds.
5. A new Council Directive on avian influenza is scheduled to be adopted in December 2005, to ensure the best possible disease control measures and bring Community law in line with the newly established OIE standards. *(EC)*
6. Within the European Union, a decision to hold a joint meeting of Chief Veterinary and Medical officers in September signalled the high level of importance attached to preparation planning. This meeting helped establish the mechanism that is now in place by providing a forum for technical experts to consider the broad range of issues linked to delivering effective preparedness within the EU as well as relevant issues outside its boundaries. This work is ongoing.
7. On the public health side, two significant meetings have been held with full participation of the EU and its Member States.

- (a) On 20 October, Health Ministers and the European Commissioner for Health, supported by a technical briefing from WHO's Executive Director Margaret Chan, held discussions on flu preparedness. This concentrated on human health issues against a background of a low level of risk to the European population posed by the current avian influenza threat.

The Health Ministers acknowledged there are varying levels of preparedness amongst Member States and stressed the importance of keeping national flu plans under constant review, and making improvements to ensure effectiveness in implementation. Particular emphasis was placed on collecting surveillance information and to share this in a form that allows comparison across national boundaries.

The need for further action was identified on how vaccines and anti-viral drugs could be made available in the event of a pandemic, communication, use of masks, and on quarantine measures and travel restrictions. The Commission is currently reviewing the existing EU Pandemic Influenza preparedness plan to ensure better co-ordination with and among national plans on the basis of the latest recommendations of WHO and in the light of the creation and operation of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. This work will continue to be kept under review and Health Ministers will hold further discussions when they meet again on 9 December.

- (b) On 24-26 October, a technical meeting was co-hosted in Copenhagen by the Regional Office of WHO and the European Commission with participation of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and representatives of all 52-Member States of the WHO European region.

8. The discussions identified a number of key issues for further work in several key areas.

On avian flu, which has to be effectively controlled, also as a preventive measure against human pandemic influenza, these include:

- improving surveillance, information-sharing and prompt laboratory confirmation of H5N1 avian influenza outbreaks in wild and domestic birds;
- sharing positive and negative samples of animal outbreaks and human cases of H5N1 infections at international level with veterinarian and human international reference laboratories;
- elaborating and implementing strategies for controlling animal disease at regional and national level, taking into account national objectives and the local context in terms of epidemiology, the competent authorities' resources for intervention, animal husbandry practices etc (*France*)

- looking into compensation for farmers or the poultry industry for culled animals so that adequate collaboration and timely notification of suspected H5N1 will be reported; and
- having clear guidelines for personal protection and use of antiviral drugs for post-exposure treatment
- fundamental research into strains of avian influenza and the mechanism of mutations of the virus. Research should be aimed at being prepared for the production of effective human and veterinary vaccines which are appropriate in a specific situation (*Netherlands*)

9. On human pandemic influenza preparedness planning, further work was needed on:

- The importance of using WHO guidance to enable standardisation and comparability of national plans;
- Ensuring national plans will operate effectively at all levels, involving all relevant sectors and avoid the overloading of key **health care workers**;
- Making full use of seasonal influenza to review surveillance and laboratory capacity and for monitoring the circulation of the virus in communities; and
- To investigate ways of strengthening vaccine production capacity.

10. A number of issues were also identified for action at the international level. These include:

- Assessment of the inter-operability of national plans;
- Development of guidelines to set standards for emergency centres, usefulness of pneumococcus vaccination, risks to general practitioners and health care workers, usefulness of masks and the use of mathematical modelling for planning purposes;
- Review of mechanisms, and opportunities to stimulate sharing of resources during phase 4 and 5, particularly for stockpiles of antiviral drugs or vaccines to stop or reduce the transmission of a novel pandemic strain at source.

11. In addition, there were a number of recommendations around developing training modules for risk communication, guidance for developing epidemic intelligence activities, particularly to address and detect rumours and to prepare guidelines for the complete epidemiological investigation of the pandemic strains at the early stage of appearance.

12. Many, if not all of these issues will have been considered by other regional groupings. What these meetings have achieved is affirmation of the importance attached to effective co-operation and collaboration within the framework of the European Union and with multinational organisations and that the International Health Regulations provide the basis for collective and coherent action.

13. A joint meeting of Chief Veterinary and Medical Officers in September, convened by the European Commission, signalled the high level of importance attached to preparation planning both from the animal and the public health points of view. This meeting has established a mechanism of consultation and co-ordination between veterinary and public health authorities in the EU to consider the broad range of issues linked to delivering effective preparedness within the EU as well as relevant issues outside its boundaries. This work is ongoing.

14. This current meeting provides an excellent opportunity to assess the development of these plans within a global context and areas where further action is needed. The UK Presidency of the European Union has helped to steer the preparations and has received a great deal of support and assistance from the Commission and fellow Member States. The importance of effective collaboration with the bodies that have come together to put on this meeting cannot be underestimated. As with other issues, we need to distinguish between what is urgent and what is important. The EU stands ready to collaborate fully with the rest of the international community in addressing these and other global and regional issues. The agenda is an extensive one.