



# Health & Consumer Voice

December 2008

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## Commission hosts first EU-China-US product safety summit

EU Consumer Commissioner, Meglena Kuneva, the US Chairman of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Nancy Nord, and the Chinese vice-Minister of AQSIQ, Wei Chuanzhong, met on 17 November in Brussels for the first high-level trilateral summit on product safety. The high level meeting was intended to send a strong political signal of the determination of all sides to keep product safety at the top of the international political agenda, recognising that open markets can only be built on strong and secure management of global product supply chains.



This trilateral summit represents the first time that the EU, China and the USA have met at such a high level to discuss product safety, signalling their willingness to coordinate closely in this area and reinforcing their mutual commitment to enforcing high safety standards. The European Commission's Rapid Alert System for dangerous consumer products (RAPEX), has consistently shown in recent years that approximately 50% of goods withdrawn from the EU market are of Chinese origin.

This is a function of course of the huge trade flows of consumer goods coming from China – for example, around 85% of toys on the European market are made in China. Equally it is clear from the RAPEX figures that significant numbers of products recalled and withdrawn are manufactured within the European Union or the US.

The tripartite meeting steps up indeed EU- China - US co-operation. First, a revised Memorandum of Understanding strengthening bilateral co-operation between the EU and China to enforce product safety standards and strengthen cooperation and exchange of information on food safety has been signed by Commissioner Kuneva, Commissioner Vassiliou and vice-Minister Wei prior to the high level meeting. Then, trilateral priority areas for action have been agreed and set out in the joint press statement, including on product traceability, co-operation by all three parties on toy safety standards, expertise exchange and joint enforcement actions. Finally, discussions focused on action to strengthen information exchange between the partners on alerts and recalls – in particular using new US product safety legislation which will allow more open information exchange on product recalls and dangerous products. This Summit was part of a broader Product Safety Week, which has been hosted by the Commission on 17-21 November.

For further information please view:

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/int\\_coop/productsafetyweek\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/int_coop/productsafetyweek_en.htm)



## In brief



### RASFF: weekly mailing launched

Since May 2003, DG Health and Consumers' Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) has been providing a weekly overview of notifications sent by food and feed authorities of all Member States of the EU plus the E.E.A. (European Economic Area) countries - Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland.

It is now also possible to receive an email informing you that the latest weekly overview of notifications is available. You can subscribe to this service via the DG Health and Consumers website.

The RASFF notifications contain information on specific findings on food or feed products that could potentially pose a risk to public or animal health. The notifications are classified in three categories:

- Alerts relate to serious risks concerning a product which is currently on the market, and where immediate measures need to be taken to protect the health of consumers;
- Information notifications do not require immediate action, either because the product has not yet reached, or is no longer on, the market; or because the risk is not considered to be serious;
- Border rejections are a specific type of notification about consignments presented at the E.E.A. border but rejected because of a risk to human or animal health. These consignments have therefore never entered the EU market.

The weekly overview provides a valuable insight into the RASFF, with information provided on the country that reported the findings, the products involved and their origin, the potential hazards and analytical results, distribution status and initial measures taken by the reporting country.

For further information please view:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/index_en.htm)



## European focus on rare diseases

The European Commission adopted on 11 November a Communication and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on rare diseases setting out an overall Community strategy to support Member States in diagnosing, treating and caring for the 36 million EU citizens with rare diseases. The limited number of patients affected and the fragmentation of knowledge about them across the European Union, makes rare diseases a prime example of where working at European level is necessary and beneficial.

Rare diseases are conditions that affect fewer than 5 in every 10,000 people. These conditions are predominantly genetic in origin, but also include rare cancers, auto-immune diseases and congenital malformations.

The specificities of rare diseases - limited number of patients and scarcity and fragmentation of relevant knowledge and expertise - single them out as a distinctive area of very high European added-value. Furthermore, rare diseases remain largely invisible in healthcare information systems due to lack of appropriate coding and classification systems, which in turn imposes medical and financial barriers on receiving treatment. Misdiagnosis and non-diagnosis (often

for as long as five years) are the main barriers faced by patients in the EU.

The need to pool together the still limited resources can therefore best be tackled and coordinated at EU level.

The Communication and Council Recommendation aims to provide a coordinated Community approach for ensuring effective and efficient recognition, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and research in the field of rare diseases in Europe. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to:

- Improve the recognition and visibility on rare diseases.
- Support policies on rare diseases in the Member States.
- Develop European cooperation, coordination and regulation for rare diseases.



For further information please see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_threats/non\\_com/rare\\_diseases\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/non_com/rare_diseases_en.htm)

## New video on mental health

Breaking the stigma around mental illness is one of the Commission's priorities. This video, presented by the European Commission on the occasion of World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2008, highlights examples of successful initiatives such as the European Alliance Against Depression and initiatives promoting corporate social responsibility in the workplace.

The video also reports on the European Pact for Mental Health and

Well-being, a very important initiative in this field, launched by Commissioner for Health, Ms Androulla Vassiliou in June 2008 at an EU high-level conference. The Pact will aim to promote mental health at all levels, by assisting governments and stakeholders to pool good practice from across Europe, in partnership with the WHO, and to formulate recommendations and action plans.

The video is available at the following URL:

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/press/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/press/index_en.htm)

## First European Masters course on Consumer Policy launched

Ms Meglena Kuneva, European Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, officially inaugurated the very first European Masters course on Consumer Policy on 19 November. This Masters course will be offered in 13 cities in 9 EU Member States: Germany, France, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom.

The aim is to create specialists in consumer policy; specialists who will be able to enter the labour market with the objective of raising consumers issues in companies, decision-making bodies and consumers' organisations. Among the subjects covered in the course will be legislation on consumer policy, consumer

psychology and behavioural analysis. Also covered will be economics, marketing and technology with a particular focus on consumers or on sustainable consumption. The Commission has been actively involved in the creation and financing of this programme.



For further information please consult:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1736&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN>

## Global Health Security Initiative

The next ministerial week of the Global Health Security Initiative is taking place in Brussels on 1 - 5 December 2008, hosted by the European Commission.

The Global Health Security Initiative (GHSI) is an informal, international partnership among like-minded countries to strengthen health preparedness and response globally to threats of biological, chemical, radio-nuclear terrorism (CBRN) and pandemic influenza.

This Initiative was launched in November 2001 by Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States. The World

Health Organization serves as an expert advisor to the GHSI. The GHSI was envisaged as an informal group to fill a gap for like-minded countries to address health issues of the day, such as global health security. The Initiative was not intended to replace, overlap or duplicate existing forums or networks.

Since its start, the Global Health Security Initiative has been successful in developing a large number of new and innovative initiatives to support our joint efforts in the area of health security and public health preparedness. During this year's ministerial week important global challenges are being addressed and ways to strengthen collaboration in health security are being defined, with the common goal of making the world safer for citizens.



For further details on GHSI please consult:

<http://www.ghsi.ca/english/index.asp>

## In brief



### Cold? Flu? Take care, not antibiotics

On 18 November, in Strasbourg, Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou launched the first European Antibiotic Awareness Day. This will be an annual event designed to raise awareness about the risks associated with inappropriate use of antibiotics and to provide information on the responsible use of antibiotics. Activities and events are planned across Europe in over 30 countries.

New surveillance data show that bacteria resistance to antibiotic treatments is increasing. However, national programmes in a number of countries are also making significant progress in reducing resistance to antibiotics.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), an EU agency, is the main organiser of the event in collaboration with many stakeholders such as health professionals and scientists. The European Commission recognises the serious challenge that antimicrobial resistance poses for public health and works closely with Member States to address this issue. The control of antimicrobial resistance involves an inter-sectoral approach; working closely with human medicine, veterinary medicine and agricultural sector.

Commissioner Vassiliou's video message about European Antibiotic Awareness Day is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/vassiliou/media\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/vassiliou/media_en.htm)

For more information please visit:

<http://antibiotic.ecdc.europa.eu/>

**EUROPEAN  
ANTIBIOTIC  
AWARENESS DAY**



A European Health Initiative



# “One Health”: a new website promoting biosecurity in the EU

Lasting from 10 to 16 November, the EU Veterinary Week 2008 aimed to increase the awareness of the EU's Animal Health Strategy for 2007–13. The Vet Week action is nonetheless not over, as a wide communication campaign has been launched on this occasion and a new website promoting biosecurity is now available to all citizens. Resulted from a partnership between the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumers and the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe, the campaign “One Health” has indeed biosecurity as its overarching theme.

Biosecurity ('bio'= life & 'security'= safety) is about being aware of the ways disease can spread and taking practical measures to minimise the risk of disease occurring and spreading – whether you are a farmer, veterinarian or traveller.

The goal of this campaign is to promote the role of the EU and Member States in safeguarding the health of farmed and domestic animals in the EU and abroad, as well as the health of citizens thanks to safe food and the prevention of zoonoses (diseases affecting animals and humans). Hence the key slogan for the campaign stresses the link between animal and public health: Animals +

Humans = One health.

Over the Vet Week, events have taken place in all EU countries to promote biosecurity, involving professionals (veterinarians, farmers, custom officers) and the general public. Using the main theme of biosecurity, actions will target two aspects of this concept: biosecurity at farm level and biosecurity at borders. The week has initiated a six-month roadshow, which will tour public events such as agricultural fairs around the EU and disseminate the campaign's messages.

Biosecurity is no longer an issue of interest only for veterinarians and farmers but also for the wider public given the unprecedented spread of certain diseases in recent years.

Animal disease outbreaks can have devastating consequences for animal health, the food supply, the economy and society as a whole. That's why the prevention and control of animal diseases represents a top priority for the European Union. In this frame, the EU Veterinary Week 2008 has represented a first opportunity to reflect on how best we can use biosecurity measures to prevent and limit the spread of disease.

For further information, please visit:  
<http://www.one-health.eu/ee/index.php>



## In brief



### Europe for Patients campaign

The Launch of the Europe for Patients Campaign on 30 September 2008 by Commissioner Vassiliou marked the beginning of a busy period for healthcare related policies in DG SANCO.

In the past two months, several of the initiatives under the Europe for Patients banner have been adopted including an EU strategy on rare diseases and the first ever European antibiotic awareness day. The next big Europe for Patients event will occur at the EU Open Health Forum on 10-11 December and more initiatives are due to be adopted by the end of this year.

Citizens can keep up to date with all the news about the Europe for patients' health initiatives by checking the Europe for Patients webpage on the EU health portal. Organisations are also encouraged to send in their news and events related to the 10 health initiatives under Europe for Patients.

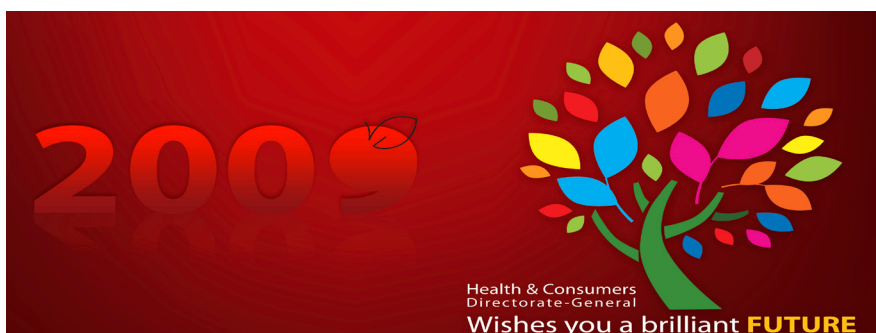


For more information please view:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/europe\\_for\\_patients/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/europe_for_patients/index_en.htm)

## Season's greetings from DG SANCO

Directorate-General for Health & Consumers and the European Commission warmly wish you Happy Holidays and a Healthy New Year!!!



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