



Health & Consumer Voice

June 2011

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E-coli outbreak in Germany

On 22 May Germany informed the European Commission's Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) of a significant increase in the number of patients with symptoms caused by enterohaemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* (EHEC-E-coli). Investigations have now concluded that Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* bacteria (STEC) are responsible for this outbreak.

The European Commission followed the outbreak closely from the start, and activated immediately all relevant alert networks. This includes the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) and the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), ensuring rapid distribution of information throughout the EU on findings in possible food sources and on human cases respectively.

On 5 June a team of seven experts from the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and

the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) arrived in Berlin, after the German authorities accepted a Commission proposal to that end. The EU experts' goal is to provide assistance with the ongoing epidemiology, verify the results and contribute to the ongoing investigations to identify the source of contamination.

Commissioner Dalli addressed this major issue with the Health and the Agriculture Ministers in two respective Council settings, as well as the European Parliament in plenary in Strasbourg. He also went on the spot to visit the crisis centre established by the German authorities.

In the meantime, the European Commission is working to the lifting of the Russian ban on EU vegetable imports.

The situation is being constantly monitored and up-to-date information can be found at:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/coli_outbreak_germany_en.htm

EU Veterinary Week 2011: vets taking the floor at Berlaymont

The conference "Crisis Management in the Food Chain" was organised as part of the 4th EU Veterinary Week, running from 16 to 22 May, to raise awareness on the important role the Commission, the veterinary profession and other actors play in safeguarding the food chain for European consumers.

On 19-20 May, the conference heard from 25 different speakers on subjects from animal welfare in times of crisis to the EU response to avian flu, from capacity building in developing countries to the role of the media.



In brief



Consumers: product safety at source in the EU market

Fewer dangerous products are reaching the EU market since such products are now identified and removed more readily. The latest Annual Report from the EU's Rapid Alert System for Non-Food Dangerous Products (RAPEX) shows evidence of how less dangerous products slip now through the net, while product safety at source stands as a key objective in the EU.

Thanks to the increasing effectiveness of the EU's Rapid Alert System for Non-Food Dangerous Products (RAPEX), a record 2244 unsafe products were banned, withdrawn from the market or recalled from consumers in 2010 (up 13% compared with 2009), according to the 2010 RAPEX Annual Report published on 12 May.

Since the introduction of RAPEX in 2004, notifications have increased from 468 (2004) to 2244 (2010). The increased capacity and efficiency is attributed to:

- more active product safety enforcement by national authorities;
- better allocation of resources;
- greater awareness among businesses of their obligations;
- enhanced cooperation with third countries, in particular China;
- network-building and training coordinated by the European Commission.

As regards the countries of origin, the number of notifications on products from China sent through RAPEX showed a slight decrease (from 60% in 2009 to 58% in 2010). 17% were of European origin, 10% were of unknown origin and 15% were from other countries.

All Member States participated in the RAPEX system by detecting and notifying new dangerous products and ensuring appropriate follow-up actions to the information received. Half of the participating countries further increased their activities in the system in 2010.

With regard to categories of products, clothing and textiles, toys, and motor vehicles top the list in 2010.

Further information is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/news/index_en.htm

In her opening remarks to the conference the European Commission's Director General for Health and Consumers Paola Testori Coggi reflected on the difficult financial times many sectors are facing, but emphasised that "although it is a long time since we have suffered a major crisis we should not be complacent. A drop in vigilance could be disastrous".

The conference was also the venue for the prize award of the international photographic competition run jointly by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumers and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) around the theme "Vets in your Daily Life", to celebrate 2011 as the World Veterinary Year and the 250th Anniversary of the veterinary profession.



Director General for Health and Consumers Paola Testori Coggi meeting HRH Prince Laurent of Belgium



Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy John Dalli taking part in the event

During the EU Veterinary Week 2011, an exhibition was organised by the Berlaymont esplanade in Brussels showing schoolchildren the importance of vets in our daily lives. It was visited by school children from across Belgium who participated in games and met Commissioner Dalli and the Director General, Mrs Paola Testori Coggi.

Speaking to the press at the stand, the Commissioner emphasised the importance of educating children at a young age "as to the real meaning of what is done around them, so that they grow up with it".

Further information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/vetweek/

and

<http://www.vetsinyourdailylife.org/>

Delivering better healthcare without borders: eHealth Week 2011 in Budapest

The eHealth Ministerial Conference 2011 was held in Budapest, as a part of the eHealth Week running from 10 to 12 May. The event was co-organised by the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers and the European Commission.

The theme of this 9th edition, "Investing in Health Systems of the Future" acknowledged that the European healthcare system is facing



substantial challenges over the next decade, such as demographic change

and reduced human resources, which force European leaders to re-design the healthcare landscape.

The eHealth Week is the biggest European event in the field of ICT for healthcare, hosted every year by the European Commission and the current holder of the Presidency of the EU Council. The event is attended by health professionals and policy makers, as well as healthcare companies.

The Hungarian Presidency presented a Declaration urging Member States to deploy eHealth services to the benefit of patients, healthcare workers and national healthcare systems. The Declaration, which also refers to the role eHealth and telemedicine can play to respond to the challenges of ageing populations and shortage of healthcare workers, has been welcomed by European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes, and Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, at the eHealth Week

"I strongly believe that Member States have much to gain from greater co-operation on eHealth, which is why the European Commission is fostering and co-financing formal EU-level co-operation in this area. I welcome this Declaration and look forward to further progress in this area – for the benefit of all of Europe's patients – for many years to come", Commissioner Dalli said.

On the margins of eHealth week, an EU eHealth Task Force conceived to advise how to promote eHealth to help patients and healthcare systems in Europe has met for the first time in Budapest. Chaired by Estonia's President Toomas Hendrik



European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes, and Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, at the eHealth Week

Ilves, its aim is to assess the role of information and communications technologies (ICT) in health and social care and to suggest ways for ICT to speed up innovation in healthcare to the benefit of patients, carers and the healthcare sector.

A recent survey on eHealth (see the article in the In brief section of this page) shows that hospitals are not yet deploying ICTs to their full potential. The eHealth Task Force will advise the Commission on how to unlock the potential of eHealth for safer, better and more efficient healthcare in Europe with regard to diagnostics, prevention and treatment.

The Task Force will take into account current policy developments at EU level, including the Digital Agenda for Europe, the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing and the recently adopted Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare, but its focus will be on the future, and on how innovation can benefit healthcare systems and society at large.

For more than two decades, the European Commission has been supporting EU research in eHealth through the funding of more than 450 projects worth some €1 billion, to enable Europe to take the leadership in research and innovation in this field.

Further information is available at:

<http://worldofhealthit.com/>

In brief



Survey on eHealth: telemedicine services not fully deployed in Europe

More than 90% of European hospitals are connected to broadband, 80% have electronic patient record systems, but only 4% of hospitals grant patients online access to their electronic records, according to the results of a survey conducted for the European Commission.

According to this survey, eHealth applications have a growing role in Europe's hospitals, but there are still wide variations in take-up, with Nordic countries taking the lead. Large, public and university hospitals are generally more advanced in eHealth terms than smaller, private ones.

The survey data was collected from 906 general public, private or university hospitals. The survey was carried out in 2010 in all 27 EU Member States, plus Croatia, Iceland, and Norway.

The survey shows that private and university hospitals in Europe are taking advantage of eHealth technologies to a greater or lesser extent:

- 92% are connected to *broadband*;
- 81% have one or more *electronic patient records systems*;
- 71% use online *eBooking systems*;
- 65% have a *common patient record system*;
- 43% exchange *radiology reports* electronically;
- 39% use *videoconferencing*.

The survey provides useful data for the work of the EU eHealth Task Force (which met for the first time in Budapest on 10 May, on the margins of eHealth week) on assessing the role of information and communications technologies in health and social care, and on suggesting ways for ICT to speed up innovation in healthcare to the benefit of patients, carers and the healthcare sector.

The deployment of eHealth technologies in Europe is a key objective of the Digital Agenda for Europe, which for example sets a 2015 deadline for giving patients online access to their medical data.

The survey's final report is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/item-detail-dae.cfm?item_id=6952



Tobacco: achieved results and new challenges to come

31 May marked the World No Tobacco Day 2011. On this occasion, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy John Dalli declared: "I would like to express my continued commitment to tackle tobacco consumption and its harmful effects in the EU and around the world. Each year 650 000 Europeans die prematurely because of tobacco use. This is staggering, and also entirely avoidable. As the Commissioner in charge of health, my principal objective is to find the right means of ensuring that new generations live longer and healthier lives in a tobacco-free Europe".

Tobacco control in the EU

A central pillar of tobacco control is EU legislation on tobacco products and on tobacco advertising. The European Commission is in charge of overseeing the implementation of these laws and of proposing necessary revisions.

For other areas of tobacco control responsibility for providing the appropriate rules and structures lies with the individual Member States. In these areas, the EU's role is to support, complement and coordinate national efforts, namely through recommendations to the Member States.

So far, 15 Member States have laws that protect citizens from exposure to tobacco smoke in a comprehensive manner. Total bans on smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces, including bars and restaurants are in place in Ireland, the UK, Greece, Spain and Hungary. Italy, Sweden, Malta, Latvia, Finland, Slovenia, France, the Netherlands, Cyprus and Poland, have introduced smoke-free legislation, allowing however for special enclosed smoking rooms.

Next steps

The Commission is currently considering putting forward a proposal for the revision of the 2001 Tobacco Products Directive in 2012. Following a public consultation launched last year and the analysis of possible options for revision within an impact assessment, the Directive could be strengthened, adapted to international tobacco control commitments and to new developments in tobacco products.

The European Commission's approach also includes helping European citizens understand what tobacco does to their health. This is why, since 2005, the Commission is financing EU-wide awareness raising campaigns.

On 16 June Commissioner Dalli launched a new campaign: "Ex-smokers are Unstoppable". The aim of this campaign is to encourage young adults in the 25 to 34 age group – meaning around 145 million EU citizens - to stop smoking and to provide them with a practical and motivating modern tool to do so at their own pace with long-term results.



Commissioner John Dalli and Director General Paola Testori Coggi taking part in the launch event of the campaign



Check it out on:

<http://www.exsmokers.eu/>

EP news



European Week Against Cancer: a healthy lifestyle to start the fight

The European Week Against Cancer 2011, re-launched under the leadership of the Association of European Cancer Leagues as one of the activities of the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer, focused this year on healthy living. The event ran from 25 to 31 May.

Every year nearly 2.5 million EU citizens are diagnosed with cancer, which is also the second most common cause of death in Europe. This figure is expected to rise due to the ageing European population. However, it is estimated that around one third of cancers could be prevented if people adopted healthier living habits.

As a keynote speaker at the launch event of the Week, held in Brussels on 25 May, the Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy *John Dalli* encouraged the participants to promote cancer prevention messages through their organisations and institutions to national, regional and local levels with a joint aim of improving the lives of all EU citizens.

MEP *Christel Schaldemose*, who also took part as a speaker in the opening conference, called for greater EU responsibility, especially in the area of food labelling: "We need to ask ourselves, whether we really want to lower the number of citizens who get cancer or suffer from cancer? If the answer is yes - and I hope it will be - then prevention and healthier lifestyles are the best ways to go. Here and now it will cost money and it will restrict the playing field of some companies, but that is a small price to pay for saving many lives in the long run".

The latest initiative of the Commission in the field of cancer is the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer (EPAAC) launched in September 2009, with the long-term aim of reducing the incidence of cancer by 15% by 2020.

Further information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/major_chronic_diseases/diseases/cancer/



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