

ECDC EXECUTIVE UPDATE

Pandemic influenza A(H1N1) 2009

Issue 8
Monday, 31 August 2009

Meetings and events

ECDC attended WHO regional meeting on response to the pandemic

ECDC representatives attended the '[WHO regional meeting on response to the pandemic](#)' on 25 and 26 August organised by the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss pandemic preparedness and response in non EU or EFTA countries. The meeting was predominantly attended by countries in the European Region that are not Members States or EFTA countries. ECDC representatives provided some technical and facilitation support.

International meeting in Beijing concerning influenza, especially the pandemic

ECDC representatives attended a series of international meeting concerning influenza, especially the pandemic, in Beijing, China, from 17 to 23 August 2009. Topics discussed included the experience of southern temperate countries, clinical care, public health measures and vaccines. Furthermore, the Chinese ministry of health presented a candid picture of their pandemic situation. Participants included country representatives and international health organizations. The aims of the meeting were to share information, learn from the experiences of southern temperate countries, and anticipate the global pandemic situation this autumn.

Weekly digest on pandemic influenza A(H1N1) 2009 from ECDC's Daily Updates

[ECDC Daily Updates](#) are published daily at 17:00 (CEST) and include information on pandemic (H1N1) 2009 epidemiology in EU and EFTA countries. The following statistics are from EU and EFTA countries as of 30 August 2009:

Cumulative case number of confirmed cases: 45 673

Cumulative number of deaths reported among confirmed cases: 104

Disclaimer: Several countries have announced recommendations on treatment on clinical signs only and restricted laboratory testing to specific population groups or in outbreaks. For these countries, the reported numbers of cases will severely underestimate the true incidence in the country, thus the presented cumulative numbers are not necessarily representative of the true incidence.

28 August 2009

The weekly influenza surveillance bulletin has been published on the ECDC website

Ireland, Norway and the UK (Northern Ireland) are the only countries in Europe currently reporting medium levels of influenza activity. What appears to have been an unusual summer peak of influenza activity in the UK and Ireland is on the decline and, apart from Bulgaria and Romania, no country is reporting an increasing trend.

http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/activities/surveillance/EISN/Newsletter/SUN_EISN_INFL_Bulletin_2009week34.pdf

27 August 2009

Poland announces change in laboratory confirmation policy

Poland announced that laboratory tests on suspected A(H1N1)v cases are no longer mandatory and a decision of testing a patient is left to the discretion of the treating doctor.

Two more oseltamivir-resistant isolates identified in US

Two more oseltamivir resistant cases of novel H1N1 flu have been identified in the US, bringing the US total to four, according to media reports quoting US CDC.

26 August 2009

European Commission policy statement on vaccination target and priority groups published

The European Union Health Security Committee and the Early Warning and Response authorities (HSC/EWRS) adopted a [policy statement](#) proposed by the European Commission which outlines a shared European approach towards identifying target and priority groups for A(H1N1)v vaccination.

The ECDC interim guidance on pandemic vaccines is available at:

http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/Forms/ECDC_DisForm.aspx?ID=388

25 August 2009

ECDC publishes a Scientific Advance on reproductive numbers and generation times for this pandemic

Following a review of a study from New Zealand last week, ECDC this week publishes a review that clarifies what is meant by Reproductive Number (R_0) and Generation Time in general, explains how these values are estimated, and lists the findings of various studies, both outside and within Europe.

This table will be updated as new data become available.

<http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/activities/sciadvise/Lists/ECDC%20Reviews/DispForm.aspx?ID=641>

US president's advisors release report assessing pandemic influenza preparedness

The US President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) released a [report assessing pandemic influenza preparedness in the US](#). Several media sources are discussing the report.

24 August 2009

Sweden published the national priority groups for pandemic vaccines

The National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden adopted [national recommendations on vaccination strategies for the pandemic \(H1N1\) 2009 influenza](#). Two groups are recommended to be vaccinated in parallel, whenever possible:

- Persons at risk of severe disease:
 - Initially all individuals above three years of age and soon after all individuals above six months of age with the following chronic underlying diseases:
 - Chronic lung disease.
 - Conditions that cause breathing difficulties like extreme obesity or neuromuscular diseases.
 - Chronic cardiovascular diseases (excluding hypertension only).
 - Immune suppressed (including HIV).
 - Chronic liver or renal failure (GFR<30ml/min).
 - Diabetes mellitus, when a febrile illness can lead to complications.
 - Asthma under medication for the past three years.
 - Pregnant women
- Healthcare personnel

Influenza A(H1N1)v isolated from turkeys in Chile

Researchers from the public health institute of Chile published a short and early [report](#) on the ProMed newsletter suggesting that they have isolated influenza A(H1N1)v in turkeys involved in an outbreak in Chile. Further confirmation of these results is awaited.

Daily strategic media monitoring

ECDC's media section collects articles of particular interest with regard to the H1N1 pandemic's development by 10:00 am every morning. It is by no means exhaustive. The purpose of the ECDC daily strategic media monitoring is to raise awareness of present key media stories across Europe, and it should not be seen as representing the views of ECDC. This strategic media monitoring is intended for internal use in ECDC and for our communication network.

Media highlights 24–28 August

Vaccine issues, such as concerns about availability, safety and effectiveness, are increasingly being covered by the media. Several newspapers reported that a significant number of healthcare professionals in different countries were unwilling to get vaccinated against influenza A(H1N1)v. Despite these safety concerns, US news reports say that the vaccine trials are on track and the only side-effects observed to date are those similar to other influenza vaccines.

The EU Health Security Committee has outlined target and priority groups for the A(H1N1)v vaccination and a number of Member States are preparing for mass vaccination campaigns. France and the UK received their first order of the vaccine on the 28 August, several media reported.

Media also reported this week that more deaths will be caused by acute viral respiratory problems due to the new influenza as compared to seasonal influenza, and that smokers are more prone developing life-threatening complications from influenza A(H1N1)v. Brazil was reported to be the country in the world with the most deaths due to A(H1N1)v.

WHO warned that a second pandemic wave should be expected as the northern hemisphere enters the colder season. Meanwhile, the US CDC released a statement saying that there is no cause for panic over the pandemic, and several European newspapers reported that their countries were preparing for the pandemic.

Recent ECDC publications on A(H1N1)v influenza

Since the beginning of the influenza epidemic, ECDC has produced a range of [information and guidance documents](#) for the benefit of the Member States. These documents are available from www.ecdc.europa.eu.

New ECDC health education document on vaccine use published

ECDC's health education document '[On the use of specific pandemic influenza vaccines](#)' was published. The document is a short summary of information on the use of specific pandemic influenza vaccines during the pandemic (H1N1) 2009. It provides background information and guidance on pandemic vaccine use, along with options for prioritisation strategies based on the current scenario of the pandemic.

Public health developments

Public health development: WHO guidelines for the use of influenza antivirals published

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued evidence-based guidelines for the use of influenza antivirals and recommendations concerning the use of the current antivirals in the management of patients infected or possibly infected with all kinds of influenza (seasonal, pandemic and animal influenzas). At present, the major interest will be in their use concerning the A(H1N1) 2009 pandemic virus. Rather than claiming to be applicable to every country in the world (or even within Europe) these guidelines are designed to give a common understanding of the underlying evidence and are specifically to assist national or local public health authorities produce their own guidelines tailored to their own circumstances. The WHO guidelines especially emphasise the use of the neuraminidase inhibitors oseltamivir and zanamivir for people in risk groups and with severe or progressive illness, so as to prevent severe illness and deaths, reduce the need for hospitalisation, and reduce the duration of hospital stays. A description of the guidelines listing the 18 recommendations with a comment is posted as a [public health development](#) on the ECDC website.

Updates from Eurosurveillance

In this week's edition of Eurosurveillance, an article from Germany analyses the first 9 950 cases of influenza A(H1N1)v in Germany. This analysis confirms findings from other sources according to which the virus is currently mainly causing mild disease, affecting mostly adolescents and young adults. Overall hospitalisation rate for influenza A(H1N1)v was low (7%). Only 3% of the cases had underlying conditions, and pneumonia was rare (0.4%). Reporting and testing requirements have been adapted recently, taking into consideration the additional information available on influenza A(H1N1)v infections.

<http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=19318>

A report analysing the cases of influenza A(H1N1)v detected in New Zealand from April to August 2009 describes the containment measures that were implemented and that appeared to slow the establishment of the pandemic during May. The pandemic accelerated markedly in June, reaching a peak within four to six weeks, and has been declining since mid-July. By 23 August, there had been 3 179 recorded cases (97.8% reported as confirmed), including 972 hospitalisations, 114 intensive care admissions, and 16 deaths. Influenza-like illness (ILI) surveillance in general practice suggests that 7.5% (95% CI: 3.4–11.2) of the population of New Zealand had symptomatic infection, giving a case fatality ratio of 0.005%. Hospitalisations were markedly higher for Māori (age standardised relative risk (RR)=3.0, 95% CI: 2.9–3.2) and Pacific peoples (RR=6.7, 95% CI: 6.2–7.1) compared with Europeans and others. The apparent decline of the pandemic (shown by all surveillance systems) cannot be fully explained. New Zealand remains in the middle of its traditional influenza season, the influenza A(H1N1)v virus appears relatively infectious, and it is estimated that only about 11% of the population have been infected by this novel agent.

<http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=19319>

Upcoming events

Zsuzsanna Jakab to speak at ENVI meeting

Zsuzsanna Jakab has been invited by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) to give a pandemic briefing at a meeting in Brussels on 1 September. As there are many new MEPs, Mrs. Jakab will also present a general overview of ECDC.

ECDC representatives to attend the Friends of the Presidency Group meeting

The Friends of the Presidency Group is holding a meeting on 2 September in Brussels to discuss pandemic-related cross-sectoral issues. ECDC representatives have been invited to speak about the role of ECDC.