

PRESS INFORMATION



Prague, 15 April 2009

More work needed in raising awareness on benefits of vaccination

Speaking at an international seminar in the Czech Senate, ECDC Director Zsuzsanna Jakab highlighted the importance of vaccines as one of the most important and effective tools for the prevention of infectious diseases in the EU, but cautioned that more work is needed to counter negative perceptions on vaccines. Mrs Jakab told parliamentarians and policy makers that "As people think some infectious diseases are no longer a threat, they are more likely to question the value and safety of vaccination." To address this challenge, ECDC works closely with the European Commission, Member States and WHO in order to facilitate a better understanding of the present situation of vaccine preventable diseases in the EU and share experiences within an EU perspective. ECDC also supports the European Immunisation Week (20-26 April 2009) led and coordinated by WHO/EURO.

The ECDC Director was speaking in Prague at the International Meeting on the Value of Vaccination, which was organised under the auspices of Daniela Filipiová, the Czech Minister of Health and with the cooperation of the Committee for Health Care and Social Policy of the Senate of the Czech Parliament. The meeting was held in the run up to European Immunisation Week and took place in partnership with the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe.

To highlight the importance of vaccination programmes, Zsuzsanna Jakab presented recent figures on measles in Europe which show the correlation between high incidence and low vaccine coverage. While acknowledging positive trends in some European countries, Mrs Jakab explained that, "In the era where measles should have been eliminated through routine childhood vaccination programmes, over 5600 cases were reported in the European Union (EU) in 2008. Data in a number of EU member states show that children are being left unvaccinated because their parents are more likely to question the value and safety of vaccination than the threat of the diseases."

Zsuzsanna Jakab highlighted that EU countries need to work together to better understand why this is happening, and to pool their knowledge on how to raise vaccine coverage rates, as this situation threatens the achievement of the measles

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elimination target in the EU by 2010. The ECDC Director reassured that the Centre is strongly committed to supporting the Member States in communicating the correct scientific facts about vaccination, so that public awareness is raised on the benefits of vaccination.

The figures quoted by Zsuzsanna Jakab are based on provisional data from the European Surveillance Network for vaccine-preventable diseases (EU-VAC.NET). These show that EU countries have so far reported 5684 cases of measles in 2008 and over 500 cases of measles so far in 2009.

Further information

www.ecdc.europa.eu

www.euvac.net

http://www.euro.who.int/vaccine/eiw/20081205_33

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