

# FLU FOCUS

Information and resources on influenza in the WHO European Region



## Issue No. 9, December 2013

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*Flu Focus* is an e-newsletter published by the WHO Regional Office for Europe that covers recent developments, research, reports, materials, upcoming events and resources on influenza. It is sent on a regular basis throughout the influenza season (October – May).

This issue of *Flu Focus* will be available shortly on the WHO Regional Office for Europe web site at <http://www.euro.who.int/flufocus> in both English and Russian.

Этот выпуск Flu Focus будет также вскоре помещен на сайте Европейского регионального бюро ВОЗ: <http://www.euro.who.int/flufocus> на английском и русском языках.

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## FEATURES

### Flu Awareness Day

The second WHO/Europe Flu Awareness Day took place on 6 November 2013 with a particular focus on encouraging health care workers to be vaccinated against seasonal influenza. There was a feature on the WHO/Europe home page and a power point presentation aimed at health care workers was prepared and launched on that day. Other products included twitter activity and a Russian translation of vaccine safety advice.

[Information for health care workers](#)

### TIP Flu Guide

WHO's successful Guide to Tailoring Immunization Programmes (TIP) has been adapted to

help Member States boost health care worker vaccination rates. Health care workers constitute a priority group for seasonal influenza vaccination and yet uptake of the vaccine is low. The TIP approach is a practical way for Member States to develop strategies and the adapted version for flu vaccination is currently being piloted in one country. A TIP Flu Guide will be published in 2014.

[More on the TIP Flu project](#)

## SURVEILLANCE

### **EuroFlu Bulletin**

In coordination with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), WHO/Europe produces the EuroFlu Bulletin throughout the influenza season. In week 49, 2–8 December, influenza activity in the WHO European Region was at a pre-season, low level. Co-circulation of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, A(H3N2) and type-B viruses was reported by countries for week 48/2013. Sporadic detections have been reported by several mainly western European countries and the percentage of sentinel samples from patients presenting to primary care that tested positive for influenza was low at 4%, which is common for this time of the year.

For more detailed information, please see the [EuroFlu](#) bulletin and the [ECDC Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview](#). An update of the situation will be published later in the season.

## LABORATORY

### **WHO/Europe practical course on influenza virology**

In order to strengthen laboratory capacities for influenza diagnosis and surveillance, the WHO Regional Office for Europe held an annual laboratory training on influenza virology at the National Influenza Centre in St Petersburg, the Russian Federation, 25–29 November 2013. The training focused on improving the capacity of laboratories to determine the antigenic profiles of circulating strains of human influenza virus, and thus better contribute to the process of selecting viruses to share with WHO collaborating centres for reference and research on influenza and subsequent selection of virus strains for seasonal influenza vaccine production.

[Training improves European laboratories' capacity to detect influenza](#)

### **“Better Labs for Better Health” initiative**

The WHO/Europe laboratory strengthening initiative, Better Labs for Better Health, aims to assist Member States in developing national laboratory policies and plans including the implementation of laboratory quality management systems and improving training curricula for laboratory staff. The work benefits all laboratories dealing with health.

Work has already started in Tajikistan and the Republic of Moldova. Cross-sectoral national laboratory working groups are getting support from their respective governments as well as WHO/Europe and its partner, the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam (KIT).

The project has strong laboratory quality and biosafety components. It is supported by WHO tools and training available in English and Russian including a laboratory quality management

system training toolkit and biosafety content.

Similar work started in Uzbekistan in September 2013 in collaboration with the German Partnership Program for Excellence in Biological and Health Security.

[Laboratory quality management system training toolkit](#)

[Biosafety and laboratory biosecurity](#)

## INFLUENZA VACCINE

[The 2013-2014 influenza vaccination recommendations](#)

Information Sheet – [Observed rate of vaccine reactions: Influenza vaccine](#)

This document produced by WHO headquarters in 2012 is now also available in Russian.

## PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

### European meeting on generic and pandemic preparedness, Bratislava

A meeting co-organized with ECDC was held 20–21 November with national experts from 39 countries. The meeting focused on the updated [Pandemic influenza risk management: WHO interim guidance](#). In particular the meeting addressed how to assess the severity of a pandemic, and implementation of the core capacities of the International Health Regulations (2005) in relation to the new European Union decision on serious cross-border threats to health (1082/2013/EU), which came into force on 25 October 2013.

[Decision document from Bratislava meeting](#)

The roadmap to implement this decision and in particular the provisions related to the Health Security Committee were discussed in detail in the plenary meeting on 28–29 November 2013 in Luxembourg. WHO continues to cooperate closely with the European Commission (EC) in the context of the roadmap for WHO/EC collaboration on health security issues.

[Update on roadmap for EC/WHO collaboration on health security](#)

A full report of the meeting in Bratislava will follow.

### Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

Cases of MERS-CoV continue to occur, but no cases were detected in travellers to the Hajj in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which took place 13–18 October this year. Of 33 WHO European Member States from which information was received, between 12 September and 21 November 2013, 12 tested a total of 444 suspected MERS-CoV cases and none of these were confirmed.

As of 4 November 2013, WHO has been informed of a total of 150 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV of which 64 have died. Although a few cases have been confirmed in the WHO European Region among travellers returning from the Middle East (all occurring before June 2013), the majority of cases have been detected in the Arabian peninsula. WHO encourages its Member States to strengthen their capacities to detect this virus and, following the current WHO surveillance recommendations, recent travellers returning from the Middle East who develop

severe acute respiratory infection should be tested for MERS-CoV.

### [WHO information on MERS-CoV](#)

#### **Avian influenza A(H7N9)**

As of 24 October 2013, a total of 137 cases, including 45 deaths, of avian influenza A (H7N9) have been reported to WHO. Although small family clusters have been reported among previous cases, evidence does not support sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus. In its risk assessment of 7 October, WHO wrote that sporadic human cases and small clusters would not be unexpected in previously affected and possibly areas/countries that neighbour China, especially as winter approaches in the northern hemisphere. However, the current likelihood of community-level spread of this virus is considered low.

### [Avian influenza overview](#)

#### **WHO/Europe response to A(H7N9) and MERS-CoV**

WHO/Europe is supporting countries in strengthening their response to A(H7N9) and MERS-CoV. From September to December 2013 trainings and workshops in the clinical management of cases of severe acute respiratory infections (SARI), the development of laboratory assays and outbreak response were conducted in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The trainings have highlighted the need to improve country capacities to conduct investigations around cases of emerging severe respiratory infections and to enhance both the knowledge of critical care clinicians as well as the resources available to them to provide supportive care to patients with respiratory failure.

### [WHO/Europe response](#)

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

The WHO Regional Office for Europe and ECDC 4th Joint Annual Influenza Surveillance Meeting will take place on 3-5 June 2014.

## **RESOURCES**

#### **Translated into Russian:**

[WHO information sheet on influenza vaccine safety](#)

[Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus \(MERS-CoV\) summary and literature update as of 22 November](#)

#### **WHO/Europe update in English and Russian:**

[Avian influenza A\(H7N9\) virus](#)

Links

[EuroFlu – WHO/Europe influenza surveillance](#)

[Weekly Influenza Surveillance Overview \(WISO\) – ECDC](#)

[Global Epidemiological update](#)

[Global virological update](#)

WHO/Europe: [Influenza](#), [Vaccines and immunization](#)

WHO headquarters: [Influenza](#), [Immunization, vaccines and biologicals](#)

ECDC: [Influenza](#)

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