

FLU FOCUS

Information and resources on influenza in the WHO European Region



Issue No.4, November 2011

From the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) - <http://www.euro.who.int/>

Flu Focus is an e-magazine published by the WHO Regional Office for Europe that covers recent developments, research, reports, materials and resources on influenza. *Flu Focus* provides updates on influenza and spotlights key features that the WHO Regional Office for Europe would like to bring to your attention. It is sent on a regular basis throughout the influenza season (week 40 – week 20 in the following year).

We hope that you will consider this e-magazine as a channel through which to share information across the Region. *Flu Focus* welcomes new knowledge and experiences in influenza responses – such as your case studies, strategic thinking, supporting material and any other relevant documentation. Please contact influenza@euro.who.int if you wish to submit something for a future issue.

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Issue No.4 Summary

At the outset of the 2011-2012 influenza season in the WHO European Region, the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) resumes publication of its e-magazine *Flu Focus* with its fourth issue. This issue opens with an overview looking back on the 2010-2011 influenza season, which was the first post-pandemic season in the Region. It goes on to provide WHO/Europe's recommendations on influenza vaccination for the 2011-2012 season, as well as information about a survey being conducted on vaccine recommendations and coverage, a WHO informal consultation on vaccine virus selection planned for December and the newly updated leaflet on case management of severe disease. This issue also provides a short synopsis of a series of pandemic preparedness workshops, held jointly this autumn by WHO/Europe and ECDC, and includes links to more detailed summaries of the workshops that have already taken place.



The influenza team at WHO/Europe reminds everyone to make sure to get their influenza vaccine, just as they did in October (see photo above).

We would like to thank the Member States, our WHO collaborating centres, our partner organization ECDC and the many experts who contribute to the work of WHO/Europe who made this publication possible.

TOPICAL FEATURES

1. **Summary of the first post-pandemic influenza season in the WHO European Region (2010-2011 season)**

An overview of the 2010-2011 influenza season has just been published on the WHO/Europe web site.

The overview gives an outline of surveillance in the WHO European Region and highlights the main trends observed in the first post-pandemic influenza season in the Region. Two of the main observations in the 2010-2011 influenza season were that the main viruses circulating were pandemic A(H1N1) 2009 virus and influenza B and that the vast majority of the circulating influenza viruses matched well with viruses recommended by WHO for inclusion in the influenza vaccine for the northern hemisphere 2010-2011 season. Influenza had a lower impact in the community in most countries compared with the pandemic. Severe disease due to influenza was seen more commonly in patients less than 65 years of age, as was seen during the pandemic.

Read the complete summary at:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/influenza/publications/2011/summary-of-the-first-post-pandemic-influenza-season-in-the-who-european-region-2010-2011>

2. **WHO/Europe recommendations on influenza vaccination during the 2011-2012 winter season**

WHO has released its yearly recommendation for the northern hemisphere influenza vaccine and recommends the following virus strains to be included in the influenza vaccine for the 2011-2012 winter season: A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like, A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)-like and B/Brisbane/60/2008-like antigens.

Furthermore, WHO recommends that the following groups be vaccinated:

- individuals >6 months with chronic heart or lung diseases, metabolic or renal disease, chronic liver disease, chronic neurological conditions, immunodeficiencies;

- elderly persons over a nationally defined age limit, irrespective of other risk factors;
- pregnant women;
- health care workers including those that work in homes that care for older persons or those with disabilities;
- residents of institutions for older persons and the disabled; and
- other groups defined on the basis of national data and capacities.

View the complete recommendations at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/influenza/publications/2011/who-europe-recommendations-on-influenza-vaccination-during-the-2011-2012-winter-season>

Other relevant references:

From WHO/Europe influenza site:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/influenza/activities/influenza-vaccines-and-immunization>

From WHO headquarters:

http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/recommendations_2011_12north/en/index.html

3. Survey on seasonal influenza vaccine recommendations and coverage during 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 seasons

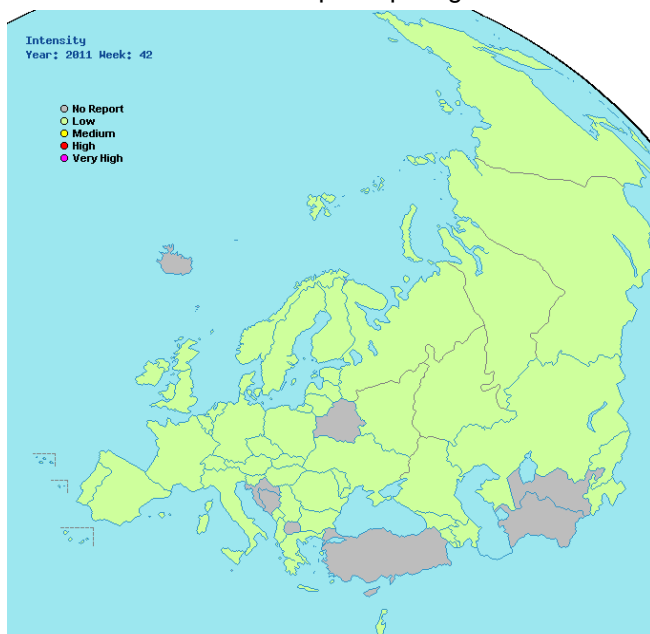
In 2003, the World Health Assembly adopted Resolution WHA 56.19 urging Member States to increase influenza vaccination coverage of all people at high risk and to attain coverage of 75% among the elderly by 2010.

To assess progress towards this goal, in coordination with ECDC and the VENICE Collaboration (<http://venice.cineca.org/>), WHO/Europe is conducting a survey in 53 Member States of the WHO European Region on seasonal influenza vaccine recommendations and coverage during the seasons 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

This survey is intended to provide a baseline for all 53 Member States from which to measure future improvements in seasonal influenza vaccine uptake in the Region. The survey, which will be distributed on an annual basis, aims to identify country specific influenza vaccination recommendations, vaccine promotion activities and to assess potential gaps in vaccine provision.

In 2010, a similar survey on the use of pandemic influenza A(H1N1) 2009 vaccine in the region was carried out and the obtained data are currently being analysed.

The information collected will be used to compile a summary of pandemic influenza A(H1N1) 2009 and seasonal vaccination efforts in the Region from 2008 to 2010. This summary will be shared with participating Member States with the aim of building a common knowledge base and strengthening the performance of influenza vaccination programmes.



SURVEILLANCE AND LABORATORY

4. EuroFlu bulletin update (week 42, 2011)

Only a few sporadic cases of influenza detected in the WHO European Region

Consultation rates for ILI and ARI in outpatient clinics and hospitalizations due to SARI are at low levels throughout the WHO European Region (green on the map). There have been sporadic

detections of influenza A(H3N2), influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and influenza B during recent weeks.

For more detailed information, please see:

EuroFlu: <http://www.euroflu.org>

European Influenza Surveillance Network (EISN):

<http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/activities/surveillance/eisn/pages/index.aspx>

5. WHO Informal Consultation for Improving Influenza Vaccine Virus Selection

The second WHO Informal Consultation for Improving Influenza Vaccine Virus Selection will take place from 7-9 December 2011 in the Centre International de Conférences Genève (<http://www.cicg.ch/en/>). This consultation, a follow-up meeting to the WHO Informal Consultation on the same topic held from 14-16 June 2010, aims to improve the influenza vaccine virus selection process through: exploring ways to improve the extent, timeliness and quality of virological and epidemiological surveillance data; the development and application of new assays and new modeling approaches; the understanding of the relationship between virus characteristics and vaccine efficacy; and the general understanding of regulatory considerations.

The Global Influenza Programme has secured limited funds to support the participation of two National Influenza Centres (NICs) per WHO region and is working closely with Regional Offices for nominations of these NICs. If you wish to participate in this meeting at your own cost, please send an email to gisrs-whohq@who.int by Friday, 11 November 2011, to express your interest and to provide your full contact details. WHO will review the requests received and issue official invitation letters. No registration fee is required.

For more information about this consultation, please visit:

http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/mtg_improve_vaccine_virus_selection/en/

6. Support to National Influenza Centres

WHO/Europe continues to support National Influenza Centres (NICs) through training and the provision of proficiency panels, i.e. WHO External Quality Assessment Project for the detection of influenza viruses by PCR (EQAP). A total of 57 influenza laboratories from 45 Member States of the WHO European Region participated in the July 2011 WHO EQAP. Laboratories that do not achieve optimal results are provided with support.

WHO/Europe works closely with the WHO collaborating centre for reference and research on influenza, the National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill, London, United Kingdom. In the coming months, WHO/Europe will provide financial support to three NIC from Lithuania, Bulgaria and the Russian Federation to receive training at the WHO collaborating centre. WHO/Europe will also support staff from the NIC of Estonia to receive training at the NIC of Finland. We would like to thank these laboratories for the important support they provide to the work of WHO.

Other relevant references:

External Quality Assessment Project (EQAP):

http://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/external_quality_assessment_project/en/

WHO collaborating centre (NIMR):

<http://www.nimr.mrc.ac.uk/who-influenza-centre>

The National Institute for Health and Welfare of Finland:

http://www.thl.fi/en_US/web/en/

7. WHO/Europe workshop on sentinel influenza surveillance, 16-17 November 2011 in Istanbul

WHO/Europe is organizing this workshop in order to bring together epidemiologists involved in sentinel influenza surveillance and staff from the ministries of health responsible for the

surveillance of communicable diseases. During the meeting, participants will discuss technical and operational issues related to influenza surveillance, as well as progress made since the implementation of sentinel surveillance in the countries. Participants of the meeting are from the Newly Independent States. A meeting report will be made available on the WHO/Europe web site following the workshop.

8. Nomenclature of the pandemic A(H1N1)2009 virus revised

In view of the pandemic A(H1N1)2009 virus now being considered a seasonal virus, and in order to distinguish it from other influenza A(H1N1) viruses, it was agreed during the WHO Consultation on the Composition of Influenza Vaccines for the Southern Hemisphere 2012 to use the name **A(H1N1)pdm09**.

PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

9. Leaflet on case management of severe disease updated

WHO/Europe has released an updated version of its leaflet on case management of severe influenza disease. As before, it contains a short overview of the risk groups for complications, the signs of severe disease related to seasonal influenza, recommendations on infection control, as well as the key elements of treatment of severe cases.

View the updated leaflet at:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/influenza/publications/2011/seasonal-influenza-key-issues-for-case-management-of-severe-disease>

10. Pandemic preparedness workshops

In the autumn 2011, WHO/Europe and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) jointly held four workshops on pandemic preparedness. The workshops addressed the changes countries are making in their pandemic preparedness plans as a result of their experience with the pandemic (H1N1) 2009. As part of these changes, countries will put more emphasis on: flexibility, i.e. planning for multiple scenarios but responding based on local risk assessment; on risk communication, especially with health care providers; on more involvement of health care providers in pandemic planning and more emphasis on operational planning at the local level. Furthermore, possible future collaboration between countries on pandemic preparedness, as well as expectations for WHO and ECDC, were addressed during the workshops

Summaries of the three first workshops can be found on the WHO/Europe web site at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/influenza/activities/pandemic-preparedness/joint-who-regional-office-for-europeecdc-workshops-on-pandemic-preparedness>.

The fourth workshop will take place on 14-15 November and a full report of the four workshops will be published subsequently.

OTHER

11. Useful links and resources:

WHO/Europe influenza site

<http://www.euro.who.int/influenza>

WHO/Europe Vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization site

<http://www.euro.who.int/vaccine>

WHO headquarters Immunization, vaccines and biologicals site

<http://www.who.int/immunization/en/>

WHO headquarters influenza site

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/en/>

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) influenza site
<http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/influenza/Pages/index.aspx>

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You can find the current and archived issues of *Flu Focus* on the WHO Regional Office for Europe web site <http://www.euro.who.int/flufocus>

If you have received this e-magazine and wish to add colleagues, partners, associates or friends (or if you wish to unsubscribe), please contact influenza@euro.who.int

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