



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

FLU FOCUS

An e-magazine with information and resources on influenza in the European Region

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From the WHO Regional Office for Europe, WHO/EURO - <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. We particularly focus on vaccine and immunization, laboratories and surveillance, and communications, but also present materials and references on clinical management and hospital preparedness. The aim of *Flu Focus* is to equip the WHO European Region's Member States and influenza focal points with information and resources that strengthen evidence-informed decision-making and country-specific activities and responses.

This e-magazine will be sent to you 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.

This issue can also be found on the WHO Regional Office for Europe website <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza> in English and Russian.

Flu Focus will provide updates on influenza and spotlight key features that the WHO Regional Office for Europe would like to bring to your attention.

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Issue No.1 Summary

Signs of increasing influenza activity in a number of countries indicated the start of the influenza season in the WHO European Region. This issue of *Flu Focus* (Issue no.1) presents you with an update from the United Kingdom which, as they do every influenza season, is carefully monitoring people who develop severe disease due to influenza, ensuring that they receive appropriate clinical treatment, and making sure that those at risk of complications due to influenza are vaccinated. We also attach the recent letter and recommendations to Member States issued by the WHO Regional Office for Europe on 15 December 2010. A EuroFlu update on influenza activity across the Region in week 49 is presented, as are the vaccine recommendations for the 2010/2011 influenza season. The process by which national influenza centres (NICs) can attain and retain recognition by WHO is described, and we welcome the first NIC to attain WHO recognition in this way (the Virology Laboratory of Mater Dei Hospital, Msida, Malta) to the Global Influenza Surveillance Network. The evaluation of European regional pandemic preparedness and an update on the global pandemic response are also presented in this issue.

TOPICAL FEATURES

1. Start of the influenza season: web article and WHO Regional Office for Europe recommendations

Signs of increasing influenza activity in week 49 in a number of countries indicate the start of the influenza season in the WHO European Region. Both influenza A and B viruses are circulating, and both pandemic A(H1N1) 2009 and A(H3N2) have been detected. As in every influenza season, reports of severe and fatal cases have been received. The United Kingdom has reported more people under the age of 65 experiencing severe illness than usual, which may be explained by the fact that the pandemic (H1N1) virus is one of the predominant strains currently circulating. Additionally, of 17 fatal cases reported so far, 14 had not received either trivalent influenza vaccine this season or pandemic influenza vaccine last year. WHO/Europe recommends that health ministries in countries ensure high rates of uptake of seasonal influenza vaccine by individuals who might be at risk of developing complications. Other recommendations on the clinical management of patients can be found in section 2.

For the complete web article please visit: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/news2/news/2010/12/start-of-influenza-season>

Or see the United Kingdom Health Protection Agency's press release on this story: http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1287146915944

2. Letter from the WHO Regional Director for Europe to Member States – plus full supporting documentation

On 15 December 2010, the WHO Regional Director for Europe sent a letter to all European Member States alerting health authorities to the start of the influenza season in Europe, so that health care facilities (especially hospitals and critical care units) can prepare for an increase in cases of respiratory illness due to influenza and to highlight the need to vaccinate people at risk of complications due to influenza.

Both the letter and an enclosure entitled *Key principles, recommendations and considerations for the 2010/2011 northern hemisphere influenza season* are attached to this email.

SURVEILLANCE AND LABORATORY

3. EuroFlu update (week 49, 2010)

Overall low levels but slowly increasing influenza activity in some countries in the European Region

Influenza activity remains low in most countries but influenza virus detections are increasing. A total of 20.4% of sentinel specimens tested positive for influenza. Pandemic influenza A(H1N1) 2009, influenza B, and influenza A(H3N2) viruses are circulating in the Region.

Current situation – week 49/2010

Of the 34 countries submitting data on influenza-like illness (ILI) or acute respiratory infection (ARI), increasing consultation rates were reported by 11 countries, mostly in children aged 0-14. The increases were generally small, except in the United Kingdom (England) which observed more pronounced increases in both ILI and ARI consultation rates for most age groups. Of the 36 countries reporting on the geographical spread of influenza, most reported either no (13) or sporadic (16) distribution, while 3 reported local activity, 3 regional activity and 1 widespread activity. The impact of influenza on health care systems was low in all but one (Ireland) of the 22 countries reporting on this indicator. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is also circulating and 19 countries reported detections during week 49.

For more detailed information, please see www.euroflu.org and <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/activities/surveillance/EISN/Pages/home.aspx>

4. National influenza centres

The process by which a national influenza centre (NIC) can attain and retain recognition by WHO is described in a new publication on the WHO/Europe website. New laboratories requesting WHO recognition must comply with the WHO Terms of Reference for NIC and be able to demonstrate that they meet basic standards of laboratory quality. This is assessed on-site by WHO staff, together with staff from the WHO collaborating centre for reference and research on influenza¹, using a standardized laboratory assessment tool for NIC (NIC-LAT).

A copy of NIC-LAT can be obtained by contacting influenza@euro.who.int.

The first NIC to attain WHO recognition in this way is the Virology Laboratory of Mater Dei Hospital, Msida, Malta, and we welcome the laboratory to the Global Influenza Surveillance Network². This brings the number of countries in the WHO European Region with a WHO-recognized NIC to 40.

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/publications/2010/how-to-become-a-who-recognized-national-influenza-centre-guidance-on-the-process-for-influenza-laboratories-in-the-who-european-region>

VACCINE AND IMMUNIZATION

5. WHO vaccine recommendations for the 2010-2011 northern hemisphere influenza season

¹ National Institute for Medical Research, Medical Research Council, Mill Hill, London, United Kingdom

² <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/surveillance/en/>

Based on available epidemiological and virological data* provided to WHO between September 2009 and February 2010, WHO has announced the recommended viruses for use in the influenza vaccine for the 2010-2011 northern hemisphere influenza season. The three recommended viruses are:

- an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus (pandemic H1N1 strain);
- an A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)-like virus; and
- a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus.

Human influenza viruses evolve continuously, and influenza vaccines are therefore updated every year to contain representative circulating viruses. WHO recommendations are offered as a guide to national public health authorities and vaccine manufacturers, to help them use appropriate viruses for the upcoming season.

WHO/Europe has published recommendations on target groups and strategies for influenza vaccination. For the complete recommendations, please follow these links:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/publications/2010/vaccine-recommendations-for-20102011-winter-influenza-season>

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/recommendations2010_11north/en/index.html

*for data from the European Region, please consult www.euroflu.org

PANDEMIC (H1N1) 2009 EVALUATIONS

6. WHO Regional Office for Europe releases report on multi-country evaluation of pandemic planning and response

WHO/Europe has completed a report on its multi-country evaluation of the response to pandemic (H1N1) 2009. This evaluation involved a broad range of stakeholders at national, regional and local levels in seven countries across the Region. Using data collected from more than 90 hours of interviews, it assessed how pandemic preparedness activities (PPA) aided the response to the pandemic. The outcome of this evaluation is a set of recommendations for good practices in pandemic preparedness. It also identifies gaps that should be addressed in future work at the country level and by WHO.

[Recommendations for good practice in pandemic preparedness: identified through evaluation of the response to pandemic \(H1N1\) 2009](#). Read the full text of the report on WHO/Europe's multi-country evaluation.

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/publications/2010/recommendations-for-good-practice-in-pandemic-preparedness-identified-through-evaluation-of-the-response-to-pandemic-h1n1-2009>

[Evaluation of the response to pandemic \(H1N1\) 2009 in the European Region](#). Read more about evaluations conducted by WHO/Europe, other European institutions and countries.

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/pandemic-h1n1-2009/evaluation-of-the-response-to-pandemic-h1n1-2009-in-the-european-region>

7. Update on the review of the global response to the pandemic

The assessment of the global response to the H1N1 pandemic is being conducted by the International Health Regulations Review Committee and will include a review of the functioning of the IHR. The review looks at the role of WHO and aims to identify lessons learned that will be important for strengthening preparedness for and response to future pandemics and public health emergencies. The Review Committee has met several times and interviewed representatives of Member States, WHO staff and other stakeholders. The Chair of the Committee will present a progress report during the Executive Board session in January 2011. A fourth meeting of the Review Committee, to which (among others) representatives of States Parties to the IHR will be invited, will take place in March or April 2011. The final report will be presented to the World Health Assembly in May 2011.

http://www.who.int/ihr/chairman_note_20101112/en/index.html

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/review_committee/en/index.html

8. Useful links and resources:

WHO/Europe influenza facts and figures

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/facts-and-figures>

WHO/Europe influenza country work

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/country-work>

WHO/Europe influenza publications

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/publications>

WHO/Europe Vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization

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

WHO headquarters Immunization, vaccines and biologicals

<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>

Sent to you from the WHO Regional Office for Europe

You can find the current and archived issues of *Flu Focus* on the WHO Regional Office for Europe website <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza>

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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