

Preventing Cross-Border Health Threats



To better protect Europeans from a wide range of health threats, and provide for a fully co-ordinated response in the event of a crisis, the European Commission has adopted a legislative proposal on the means to address serious cross border health threats. Building on lessons learned with recent crises such as the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, the volcanic ash cloud in 2010 and the outbreak of E. coli in 2011, the Commission is proposing to beef up the means to prepare for and to address such crises.

The main measures proposed include:

- to extend the existing co-ordination mechanism for communicable diseases to all health threats caused by biological, chemical or environmental causes; to reinforce the mandate of the Health Security Committee;
- to strengthen preparedness for crises e.g. by enabling joint purchasing of vaccines; to provide the means to recognise a European "health emergency situation" for the purpose of making medicines available faster;
- and to agree on European wide emergency cross border measures when a crisis results in large scale mortality and national measures fail to stop the disease from spreading.

European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli said: "In today's globalised society, people and goods move across borders and illnesses can spread around Europe – and the globe - within hours. This is why the European Union and its Member States must be prepared to act together in a fully co-ordinated manner to stop a disease from spreading. The proposal we adopted today gives us the means and the structures to effectively protect our citizens across Europe from a wide range of health threats".

Biological, chemical or environmental factors can trigger serious cross border health threats. Such threats can materialise as diseases that spread from person-to-person such as flu, food and water-borne diseases such as botulism, infections with E. coli or result from extreme weather conditions like heat waves or cold spells. In recent years, the European Union has gone through various crises of this kind. Building on the Early Warning and Response System for communicable diseases created in 1998, the Commission's proposal puts forward measures to strengthen the response to serious cross-border threats in the EU.

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