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Strategy against an influenza pandemic

European Parliament resolution on the strategy against an influenza pandemic

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 152 of the Treaty,
- having regard to Oral Question O-0089/2005 by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety pursuant to Rule 108 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the statement by the Commission,
- having regard to Rule 108(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a warning of a possible influenza pandemic in the near future,
- B. whereas an influenza virus could spread within a few days from one continent to another,
- C. whereas combating an influenza virus requires the right and antivirals in sufficient quantities,
- D. whereas a likely source of a pandemic would be a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus (H5N1) which, following mutation or recombination with the human influenza virus, may produce a highly aggressive influenza which is not covered by existing vaccines and therefore requires a 'new' vaccine,
- E. whereas the greatest risk of an influenza pandemic is from Asian countries, in which this Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus strain has been spreading for two years despite continued efforts by the competent authorities to contain the disease, and whereas it is therefore in the EU's own interests, as well as those of international solidarity, to provide greater support to these countries,
- F. whereas the development and production of new vaccines is difficult and expensive and could take at least six months from the time when the virus is isolated and studied,
- G. whereas the potential threat of the avian influenza virus recombining with seasonal influenza would be reduced by ensuring that all those at high risk of exposure to the avian influenza virus are immunised against seasonal influenza,
- H. whereas there is a substantial risk of inadequate, inequitable and delayed supply of vaccines in countries which do not produce them,
- I. whereas the occurrence of a pandemic outside the EU would also entail a serious health threat to the citizens of the European Union,

- J. whereas Member States are responsible for taking the necessary measures to prevent and prepare for an influenza pandemic, but the Commission plays the coordinating role,
1. Considers the warnings by the WHO and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) about a potential influenza pandemic to be extremely serious; points out that an outbreak in one Member State or in the EU's neighbouring areas would cause an immediate health threat to the whole European Union;
 2. Urges the Member States to take all necessary steps to prevent recombination of H5N1 into a flu virus that can be transmitted from person to person; insists therefore that workers in and connected to the poultry sector be vaccinated as a matter of priority;
 3. Points out that, in this connection, prior provision must be made for emergency plans in the event of human contamination, and that such emergency plans must seek to:
 - secure the necessary coordination between Member States,
 - ensure the necessary consultation and exchange of information with third countries,
 - avoid panic among the general public,
 - combat any trafficking of birds that may arise should serious risks actually emerge,
 - determine the areas to be isolated as a priority,
 - identify the population groups to be vaccinated as a priority,
 - ensure fair and universal distribution of products against a human influenza pandemic;
 - provide for an effective public communication and information strategy;
 4. Urges the Council to come to an agreement on influenza preparedness plans which guarantees the commitment of all Member States; stresses that these plans should include advance purchase agreements to ensure adequate supplies of vaccines and antivirals to meet pandemic demand as well as antibiotics to treat secondary infections to do so without delay and to communicate them to the Commission; urges all Member States to update their plans according to the results of real-time simulations and the new WHO and ECDC recommendations and to communicate those updates to the Commission;
 5. Calls on the Commission to strengthen its coordinating role in close collaboration with the ECDC and to support the efforts of Member States by offering technical advice for their preparedness planning; calls on the Commission to report regularly to the European Parliament on the state of play and the actual amounts of vaccines in stock;
 6. Urges the Commission to implement, together with the ECDC, a comprehensive communication strategy in the event of a pandemic;
 7. Points out that the key element in efficient preparedness is the timely development and quantitatively adequate production of vaccines and antivirals; calls on the Commission and the Member States to cooperate with industry in order to undertake the necessary steps for the production of new vaccines in the shortest possible time, which can, according to scientists, be between three and eight months;
 8. Urges Member States to increase influenza vaccination coverage before a pandemic in accordance with WHO recommendations, which will also encourage industry to expand production capacity to meet the expected pandemic demand for vaccines; calls on Member States to target poultry farmers as part of the highest-priority wave of

vaccination in order to reduce the chances of recombination of human and avian influenza viruses at one of the most important potential interfaces; reminds Member States that stockpiling vaccines and antivirals with a view to a pandemic will be less costly than the losses after an outbreak without vaccines;

9. Notes that Member States have very different financial resources for stockpiling vaccines and antivirals as well as for advance purchase agreements with industry; suggests that the Commission consider the possibility of using the EU Solidarity Fund as a precautionary instrument for pre-emptive action in preparation for an influenza pandemic, including the production of new vaccines and the development of new testing methods;
10. Urges the Commission to ensure a continuous exchange of information with the affected countries; takes the view that the European Union should provide assistance to the affected countries in order to help them enhance their risk assessment and containment capacities;
11. Points out that the principal source of infection still remains the countries of South-East Asia; asks the Commission and the Council, therefore, to cooperate with these countries economically and scientifically in order to eradicate this principal source, especially considering that the possibilities of virus mutation are very high;
12. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase their support for the countries currently most affected by the avian influenza virus and to provide efficient technical aid in order to contain the virus and reduce the risk of its mutation or recombination into a form which could start a pandemic;
13. Calls on the Commission and Member States to support a vaccination programme for all poultry farmers in countries affected by avian influenza, noting that these workers are at one of the most important interfaces between the human and avian influenza viruses, where a strain causing a global pandemic could originate;
14. Calls on the Commission to present a plan to ensure a rapid and effective redeployment of vaccines and antivirals in case of an outbreak in order to prevent the pandemic from spreading, taking into account especially Member States which do not produce vaccines and antivirals;
15. Points out that inspections, investigating the trekking routes of migratory birds, random screening of animals and vaccination against avian influenza can be effective tools to supplement disease control measures; welcomes, therefore, the recent proposal from the Commission for a new directive on Community measures for the control of avian influenza, in which vaccination has taken a more prominent role in combating this disease; urges Member States to make optimal use of this instrument so as to reduce as much as possible the necessity for mass slaughter of animals, and calls on all actors in the meat sector to fulfil their responsibility in this matter by guaranteeing the sale of products originating from vaccinated and unvaccinated animals alike;
16. Asks the Council to adopt a plan on the prevention of the spread of influenza from country to country by means of restrictions on international travel and to have in place plans for port and airport health checks;

17. Calls on the Health Council to mandate the Commission to take emergency measures within 24 hours, should a flu pandemic reach the EU or bordering states, such as quarantine and disinfection measures at airports for flights from infected regions, and travel restrictions;
18. Calls on the Commission to provide support for preventive and cooperation measures and technical aid to third countries, especially those in Asia, with the aim of ensuring prevention and diagnosis in the countries of origin of avian influenza;
19. Urges the Commission to help Member States to draw up plans for quarantine arrangements;
20. Calls on the European Union institutions to draw up their own preparedness plans;
21. Urges the Member States effectively to communicate to their citizens the risks of spreading the disease through travelling;
22. Urges the Member States and the Commission to make available funds for assistance to South Asian countries in combating the disease in terms of expertise and finance;
23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Member States.