# Preparedness and response to biological and chemical agent attacks

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Since the events of autumn 2001, there has been a need to intensify cooperation between the Member States and the Commission to strengthen health defences against deliberate releases of biological agents. This Communication reflects the progress made in carrying out the 25 actions which form a coherent health security programme and describes the outlook for continuation of action at Community level in this field. The measures pursue the following main goals: - to set up a mechanism for information exchange, consultation and coordination for the handling of health-related issues related to attacks in which biological and chemical agents might be used or have been used in attacks; - to create a EU-wide capability for the timely detection and identification of biological and chemical agents that might be used in attacks and for the rapid determination of relevant cases, in particular by building on systems already available and aiming at long-term sustainability; - to create a medicines stock and health services database and a stand-by facility for making medicines and health care specialists available in cases of suspected or unfolding attacks; - to draw up rules and disseminate guidance on facing up to attacks from the health point of view and coordinating the EU response and links with third countries and international organisations. The Communication states that the extent and degree of implementation of measures varies between countries, as do their resources in expertise, materials, equipment and facilities. Of utmost importance in countering bioterrorism is speedy detection of a release and immediate transmission of alert and relevant information to those charged with mounting the appropriate response. Member States are improving their epidemiological surveillance apparatus and their biological and chemical monitoring capabilities and have set up national systems of alert and information transmission. At the EU level, the Rapid Alert System was set up to allow prompt transmission of alerts and exchange of information between the Member States and the Commission. The system needs to evolve and expand to be able to interpret public health intelligence and provide advance warning of outbreaks. Routine surveillance will also need to be strengthened. Since it is essential for Member States to co-ordinate their preparation and responses, the EU has, through the Health Security Committee, a mechanism for consultation and coordination. It can provide coherence to counter-measures throughout the Union. It also provides the platform through which emergency plans are shared and assistance in expertise and other resources can me made available between Member States. More work needs to be done on specific plans for certain agents. Adequate capacity in public health services will be crucial in deciding on counter-measures or switching to different ones. Laboratory capacity is not sufficient in many Member States. It is imperative that Member States share resources and those with advanced facilities assist those without. The Member States and the Commission are working together to bring this about. They are also working together to prepare the health services for emergencies through the issuance of guidelines, the dispatch of expertise and the provision of scientific advice. Shielding people against agents and mitigating the effects of exposure to them requires recourse to suitable medicines. The communication finds that EU pharmaceutical armoury against pathogens and chemicals that can be used in attacks is incomplete and insufficient. Stockpiling at EU level has been considered, but Member States have shown preference for developing national stockpiles only. They are however, keen to undertake action at the EU level for the development of new biological products such as vaccinia immunoglobulin, anti-toxins and better and safer vaccines. It has become apparent that more time is needed fully to accomplish the objectives of the health security programme than was initially foreseen. Provision must be made in the Community budget for payment of an extension phase (of at least 18 months), of the remuneration of the national experts specifically seconded to the Commission to carry out actions in connection with health security, their expenses for the missions necessary to perform these tasks, reimbursement of the travelling expenses of the members of the Health Security Committee and its working groups and costs of specific studies and consultations connected with health security issues. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS : - Budget headings: - A-7003 National and international civil servants and private-sector staff temporarily assigned to the

institution; - A-701 Missions; - A-7030 Meetings; - A-705 Studies and consultations. - Overall figures : Total allocation for action (Part A of the Budget): EUR 5 282 904 The amount for the first year is EUR 480 264 and for the five subsequent years EUR 960 528 each year. - Period of application - 2003-2008. - Overall financial impact of human resources : EUR 354 528. This sum is the expenditure for 12 months. Other administrative expenditure is EUR 606 000 for 12 months.