Resolution on the strategy against an influenza pandemic

2005/2627(RSP) - 26/10/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the strategy against an influenza pandemic. It considered the warnings by the WHO and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) about a potential influenza pandemic to be extremely serious. An outbreak in one Member State or in the EU's neighbouring areas would cause an immediate health threat to the whole European Union. Parliament urged Member States to take all necessary steps to prevent recombination of H5N1 into a flu virus that can be transmitted from person to person. Workers in and connected to the poultry sector must be vaccinated as a matter of priority. 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 and consultation with third countries; avoid panic among the general public, and determine the areas to be isolated a priority; identify the population groups to be vaccinated as a priority; ensure fair and universal distribution of products against a human influenza pandemic; and provide for an effective public communication and information strategy.

Parliament also urged the Council to come to an agreement on influenza preparedness plans which 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.

Parliament went on to call 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.

Member States are asked 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. Member States must target chicken 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. Parliament reminded 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.

Parliament also suggested 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. The principal source of infection still remains the countries of South-East Asia.

Parliament called on the Commission and Member States to support a vaccination programme for all chicken 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. 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. Finally, Parliament urged 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.