

Common case definition on novel flu virus

The Commission today adopted a common European definition for the novel flu virus. This will allow for an amendment to Decision 2002/253/EC, which lays down case definitions for reporting communicable diseases across the European Union. This is a key step taken by the Commission in response to the novel flu virus in view of the rapidly changing situation.

Health Commissioner, Androulla Vassiliou, said "This case definition is a major step forward in setting common EU standards for diagnosing the novel flu virus. It will enable more efficient compilation of comparable information on the novel flu virus at European level by ensuring that we are all talking about the same things. It will help us develop timely responses and drive forward our collective response to help protect the health of EU citizens."

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) provided, at the request of the Commission, a technical document which served as basis for the European case definition. The Decision is updated so that it integrates clinical, laboratory and epidemiological criteria as well as three case classification definitions to be used in all Member States, covering cases under investigation, probable cases (those showing flu-like symptoms and likely exposure to the disease) and laboratory confirmed cases.

Current epidemiological situation in the EU

The situation is evolving quickly with 19 confirmed cases in the EU (10 in Spain, 5 in UK and 3 in Germany and 1 in Austria) as of 08h00 on 30 April. All EU confirmed cases have a history travel to Mexico, except for one case in Spain where there is evidence of transmission within the household. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is continuously monitoring the situation and providing daily epidemiological updates on its website. WHO declared level 5 yesterday.

Novel Influenza virus

The novel virus (human swine influenza A(H1N1)) has been found to contain genes from pig, bird and human influenza viruses, in a combination that has never been observed before anywhere in the world

People become infected with novel influenza virus A(H1N1) in the same way as with the normal seasonal influenza. It spreads from person to person via droplets from an infected person who is coughing and sneezing. Symptoms of novel influenza A(H1N1) in humans are usually similar to regular human seasonal influenza symptoms, involving fever of sudden onset and respiratory symptoms; diarrhoea might also occur. Severe complications can occur even in normally healthy persons who become infected with the virus. The virus is sensitive to some of the available antiviral drugs.

Commission's Health Emergency Operating Facility

The Health Emergency Operations Facility (HEOF) is a part of the Commission's public health emergency management structure, coordinated by the Senior Management Team.

The main objective of the HEOF is to provide the Commission and Member States with an overview of the situation and to ensure effective coordination between the

Commission, Member States, other associated countries (candidate countries, EEA countries), Agencies, such as European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) and European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA), and international organisations (such as the World Health Organisation) during an emergency situation.

For more information:

Regularly updated information on the novel flu can be found on the websites of:

European Commission, Directorate General Health and Consumers:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/com/Influenza/novelflu_en.htm

European centre of Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC):

<http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Default.aspx>

World Health Organization (WHO): <http://www.who.int/en/>