

Citizens' summary

Combating H1N1 flu pandemic in the EU - Commission communication

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

- Earlier this year a serious flu strain (A(H1N1) virus) – first known as 'swine flu' or 'Mexican flu' – was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- Coordinated public health action is needed throughout the EU and internationally, to minimise the risk of large-scale outbreaks and the disruption they cause.
- The EU Commission has issued a communication package:
 - describing the **key issues for public health coordination** in the EU and internationally
 - highlighting some of the **negative economic and social impacts** the pandemic could have and how a **coordinated public health response can help minimise these**.
- The package includes documents on
 - vaccination strategies
 - the process for regulating vaccines and antiviral drugs
 - joint procurement of vaccines
 - communicating to the public and media
 - supporting countries outside the EU.

8 GOOD REASONS WHY ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN BY THE EU

- Pandemics do not recognise national borders. They affect not only public health but also societies and economies throughout the EU and the world.
- Not all EU countries are equally well-equipped or prepared to deal with such a pandemic, so a coordinated and supportive EU-level approach to public health measures can substantially benefit public authorities and citizens throughout the EU.
- The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control can provide scientific advice and guidance in a way that allows national resources on scientific assessments to be more efficiently allocated.
- Cooperation between the Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the World Health Organisation ensures that measures taken in the EU are in line with WHO recommendations and the International Health Regulations.
- Coherent and agreed approaches on issues such as travel advice and school closures minimise the negative impact of public health measures on other sectors of the economy and society.
- Europeans want to know how to protect themselves. Information given to the public and the media in all countries should be coherent, objective and up-to-date.
- Coordinating European donors at EU level is the best way to optimise the support given to countries elsewhere, including in the developing world.

- The EU Health Security Committee can help ensure that even those countries with fewer financial resources and less adequate capacities can procure the vaccines and anti-viral drugs they need.

WHEN IS THE PROPOSAL LIKELY TO COME INTO EFFECT?

- The communication will be presented at a special meeting of EU Health Ministers on 12 October.