



EUROPEAN  
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*Invitation for journalists*

## **EU-Funded Research on Pandemic and Avian Influenza**

***Media Briefing and Visit to European Research Facilities***

***Tuesday, 7 February 2006 – Ghent and Leuven (Belgium)***

The European Commission's Directorate General for Research will be organising a technical media briefing on EU-funded Research on Pandemic and Avian Influenza. The one-day event (7 February 2006) will include thematic briefings conducted by leading scientists and visits to top European research facilities near Brussels. Participants will have the unique opportunity to see first-hand research being conducted in the field of vaccines and antivirals for avian and human influenza. European researchers will also present some influenza projects which have already produced important results.

The European Union has financed transnational research on pandemic influenza vaccine development since 2001. Early projects worked to develop an egg-free vaccine, which is faster and safer to produce, along with innovative application techniques. New research is now underway with the objectives of fighting the disease at the source (infected birds) and protecting human populations through pandemic influenza vaccines. Future EU Research will improve vaccine efficiency by adding adjuvants, substances that boost the body's immune response to vaccine antigen. Additionally, research teams are currently focused on developing a universal flu vaccine that will provide a lifetime of protection from influenza.

During the technical briefing, several EU-funded projects will be presented by participants involved in the groundbreaking research. These projects include investigations of pandemic influenza vaccines, antiviral drugs, universal vaccines and influenza in animals.

### **Media programme**

Journalists are invited to arrive in Brussels on the evening of Monday, 6 February and participate in a full-day of activities on Tuesday, 7 February. Following an introduction on EU-supported research in avian and human pandemic influenza, visits to the following sites are planned:

- the University of Ghent's VIB (Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology) laboratories and Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and
- the Rega Institute for Medical Research in Leuven.

During the on-site visits, attendees will meet the developers of some of the more promising vaccines and antivirals, tour PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) and Biosafety 3 laboratories (subject to safety access restrictions) and visit research facilities dealing with pigs.

## Speakers

- High level European researchers
- Octavi Quintana-Trias, Director of Health at the European Commission's Directorate General for Research
- Christian Patermann, Director for Biotechnology, agriculture and food at the European Commission's Directorate General for Research

## European Research Projects to be Presented

- NOVAFLU is focused on developing more effective strategies for the human vaccination against epidemic and pandemic influenza.
- AVIFLU is focused on studying the pathogenesis of avian influenza, as well as improving diagnosis and control of avian infections.
- FLUAID focuses on diagnostic tools and vaccines to be used in outbreak management and in the application of control measures based on vaccinations to combat avian influenza infection. Leading European institutes will co-operate with Asian laboratories as part of this research project.
- UNIVERSAL VACCINE aims to develop a powerful, new, safe and easily administered nasal vaccine for humans that provides a lifelong protection against influenza. Website: [www.universolvaccine.org/](http://www.universolvaccine.org/)
- VIZIER aims to identify potential new drug targets against RNA viruses by providing a comprehensive structural characterisation of the replicative machinery of a carefully selected and diverse set of viruses. Website: [www.vizier-europe.org](http://www.vizier-europe.org)
- VIRGIL is the first European surveillance network capable of addressing current and emerging antiviral drugs resistance developments in the field of viral hepatitis and influenza. Website: [www.virgil-net.org](http://www.virgil-net.org)
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All these of these projects have ambitious objectives that can only be achieved through intensive collaboration between research teams with complementary expertise. Further information on the Commission's work in this area will be available as of 7 February.

## For further information on the media programme, please contact:

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For this event, the European Commission is assisted by external contractors.

## To register to attend this event, please contact:

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