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*News alert<sup>1</sup>*

## EU-funded Research on Pandemic and Avian Influenza

The European Commission is today holding a media briefing to present current EU-funded research on pandemic and avian influenza. During thematic briefings in research facilities in Belgium, leading European scientists will demonstrate research activities in the field of vaccines and antivirals for avian and human influenza. European researchers will also present some influenza projects which have already produced significant results.

Under the 5th Framework Programme for Research (1998-2002, FP5) **€6 million** were spent on avian and pandemic influenza in 22 institutions and national reference laboratories across 8 European countries. Moving into the 6th Framework Programme (2002-2006, FP6), activities were extended and reinforced with a set of new projects launched in both the animal and human health sectors and with more than a three-fold increase in the EU contribution (**€16 million** plus a share in two large Networks of Excellence and an Integrated Project), demonstrating a strong EU commitment to supporting this emerging research field, as well as providing essential support to EU policies. To date, a total of over 120 laboratories across 21 European countries have been funded for research on influenza within the Framework Programmes.

European research on vaccine development for pandemic influenza has been financed since 2001 by the European Union. Early projects worked to develop an egg-free vaccine, which is faster and safer to produce, along with innovative application techniques. 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 could provide a lifetime of protection from influenza.

The European Commission has just made a further **€20 million** available for research into avian and pandemic influenza. Potential projects are invited to make an application before 22 March 2006. This call looks to fill existing gaps in research in a relatively short time perspective to serve as a foundation for new and longer term research investments in the years to come. Relating to animal health, the call covers issues such as developing vaccines for avian species, improved diagnosis and early warning systems, the ecology and pathogenesis of avian influenza infections, migratory birds, avian influenza virus survival, reinforcement of Community and national reference laboratories, technology transfer to third countries. Relating to human health, the call covers issues such as clinical research on pandemic influenza vaccines, better understanding of the influenza virus and strengthening support to surveillance. This research money is being released now to address a pressing public health need.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on European research, including previous press releases, visit our Web site at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research>

During the technical briefing, **several EU-funded projects** including investigations of pandemic influenza vaccines, antiviral drugs, universal vaccines and influenza in animals are presented. Examples include:

- **NOVAFLU** - developing more effective strategies for the human vaccination against epidemic and pandemic influenza.
- **AVIFLU** - studying the pathogenesis of avian influenza, as well as improving diagnosis and control of avian infections.
- **FLUAID** – developing 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** - developing a powerful, new, safe and easily-administered nasal vaccine for humans that provides lifelong protection against influenza. Website: [www.universalvaccine.org](http://www.universalvaccine.org).
- **VIZIER** - identifying 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** - 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).

All these of these projects have ambitious objectives that can only be achieved through intensive collaboration between European and/or international research teams with complementary expertise.

#### **Note for editors**

Background information for today's media briefing (electronic **press kit**), including speeches, project fact sheets and portraits of researchers, will be made available at [www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/press/2006/pr0702en.cfm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/press/2006/pr0702en.cfm).

Further information on the **open INFLUENZA call** is available at [www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/press/2006/pr1701en.cfm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/press/2006/pr1701en.cfm).

For the thematic priority on "**food quality and safety**" in the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6): [www.cordis.europa.eu.int/food](http://www.cordis.europa.eu.int/food).

For the thematic priority on "**life sciences, genomics and biotechnology for health**" in the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6): [www.cordis.europa.eu.int/lifescihealth](http://www.cordis.europa.eu.int/lifescihealth).