Pandemic planning in the Community

Are we prepared for an influenza pandemic in Europe?

The surveillance perspective

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The European Influenza Surveillance Scheme: introduction

The European Influenza Surveillance Scheme (EISS) was established in 1996 and has received funding from the EC since November 1999. Today, EISS covers 20 different surveillance networks across Europe: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, the Slovak Republic, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Wales.

EISS is based on an integrated clinical and virological surveillance model. Sentinel physicians (usually 1-5% of physicians in the country) collect clinical information on influenza and these same physicians take nose and/or throat swabs from patients diagnosed with influenza. The swabs are sent to a national reference laboratory for testing. The EISS surveillance model therefore combines clinical and virological data in the same population.

EISS introduced a Weekly Electronic Bulletin during the 2000/2001 influenza season. This bulletin provides a weekly overview of influenza activity in Europe in the form of a map, a table, graphs and a commentary written by experts from the EISS group (see: www.eiss.org). The bulletin appeared for 26 consecutive weeks during the 2000/2001 season.

The European Influenza Surveillance Scheme: an influenza pandemic

During an influenza pandemic, health care professionals, policy makers, the press and the general public would require clear, precise and regular information on the epidemiology and virology of influenza in Europe. The EISS website would provide a valuable resource for this information.

Persons visiting the website would have access to the Weekly Electronic Bulletin, information about influenza and influenza vaccination, links to national and international websites (e.g. WHO and CDC) and contact persons across Europe. The Weekly Electronic Bulletin would provide: influenza morbidity rates (ILI/ARI per 100,000 population), age specific morbidity rates (important for targeted vaccination campaigns) and the precise circulation of influenza viruses. In addition, we could implement the following:

- A Weekly Electronic Bulletin updated two times per week
- The publication of statements related to an influenza pandemic e.g. statements made by the EC, national recommendations for vaccination, emergency measure statements, etc.
- Links to non-surveillance related information sources e.g. Ministries of Health, medical websites, information websites, vaccine manufacturer websites, etc.

EISS is also active in the following areas which are relevant to pandemic planning:

- It has made an inventory of national pandemic plans in Europe
- It is in the process of initiating a European mapping project of influenza
- It has initiated a modelling project of influenza epidemics using the EISS database
EISS is ready and willing to support other initiatives aimed at preparing the Community for a possible influenza pandemic.