



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Public health, country knowledge, crisis management
Crisis management and preparedness in health

Audio conference of the Health Security Committee on the recommendations of the IHR Review Committee

27th of April 2016, 15:30 to 17:00 (CET)

Flash report

Meeting objectives

The European Commission convened an audio meeting of the Health Security Committee (HSC) to discuss the draft recommendations of the Review Committee on the role of the International Health Regulations (IHR) in the Ebola outbreak and response in preparation of the 69th World Health Assembly (23-28 May 2016), and to discuss the feedback from the first meeting of the Ad-hoc working group of the Health Security Committee on the Zika virus.

The audio conference was chaired by John Ryan, Acting Director of DG SANTE, Directorate C, Public Health, country knowledge, crisis management.

Introduction

The chair welcomed the participants and introduced the objectives of the meeting. The HSC adopted the minutes of the audio meeting on the Zika virus epidemic, which took place on 17th of March. The agenda was agreed by the participants.

Draft Recommendations of the Review Committee on the role of the IHR

The Chair referred to the outcome of the High Level Conference on Global Health Security (22-23 March 2016) in Lyon, where a progress report on the work of the IHR Review Committee was presented. The discussion focused on the improvements needed in the implementation of IHR, country assessments, the development of cooperation and assistance capacities as well as lessons learned from recent outbreaks. He recalled the importance of the conclusions drawn by Commissioner Andriukaitis and Mrs Marisol Touraine, the French Minister for Social Affairs and Health, and the contribution the conference made to show EU support for the implementation of IHR and to improve global health security.

It is important that the HSC Members discuss the Draft Recommendations with a view to preparing a common EU position ahead of the World Health Assembly in May.

There will be two reports: the first on the implementation of the IHR, which will provide assessment on the IHR implementation and the second report with the final recommendations of the IHR Review Committee.

The Chair outlined the draft document, bringing attention to the recommendation on the need to implement the IHR rather than amend them and to improve WHO's risk assessment and risk communication by creating a standing advisory committee and an intermediate level of alert, the International Public Health Risk Alert.

The discussion underlined the importance of introducing the concept of “intermediate level of alert” in relation to the activation of the EU pharmaceutical legislation and the related provision in the cross border health threats decision. The draft recommendations are in line with the conclusions of the conference in Lyon, in particular regarding the external evaluation of IHR core capacities which could be mutually complementary with the Alliance for Country Assessment project.

Once the report is published, it will be submitted for endorsement by the WHA. WHO is already working to take forward work in the framework of the new programme for IHR implementation. Preparations for the WHA are underway with France and Finland being in the lead for the elaboration of the EU statement, in liaison with the health attaches of the Member States.

The chair highlighted the importance of an EU Statement on the draft recommendations at the 69th World Health Assembly and invited Member States to continue to exchange their views on the proposed recommendations through the HSC secretariat.

Feedback from the meeting of the Ad-hoc Working group on the Zika virus epidemic

The Ad-hoc Working group on Zika virus was set up at the HSC meeting of the 17th of March to bring together national experts to discuss and propose public health measures in response to the Zika virus for consideration and coordination by the HSC. It met for the first time on the 22nd of April by audio and discussed disinsection, the outcome of the technical meeting of the ECDC in Paris, and the updated information to travelers.

Comprehensive interim guidance on disinsection of ships has been provided by the Joint Action SHIPSAN. Regarding the disinsection of aircraft, ECDC informed that clearer guidance was going to be provided soon by the WHO.

Italy informed that it was compulsory for aircraft to present a disinsection certificate. Italy will provide further information on this issue to HSC members in the coming days in writing. WHO HQ pointed to the importance of carrying out vector control measures not only in aircraft but also in the whole airport.

Regarding the information to travelers, ECDC presented the draft document “Zika virus disease epidemic: Information to EU citizens travelling to affected areas” dated from 25th of April 2016. The document which has been distributed to the HSC has taken on board feedback from the Working Group.

The discussion underlined the difficulty to establish time frames for protective measures after the return from affected areas due to the limited scientific evidence. A map of the affected areas could be attached to the information for travellers, because some countries are only affected by mosquito infestation in certain regions.

The suggestion to add information on how to identify and eliminate mosquito breeding sites was discarded as not appropriate in the context of information for travellers which should contain guidance to be applied at a more general level.

The Chair concluded that the HSC considered the “Information to EU citizens travelling to affected areas” in its version from 25th of April 2016, and noted that the document will be revised on a regular basis and discussed again as required. The Zika working group can be convened in case of need.