



MINISTRY OF HEALTH
&
SOCIAL SOLIDARITY



HELLENIC CENTER FOR
DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION

HCDCP NEWSLETTER

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August 2011

Vol. 06/ Year 1st

ISSN 1792-9016

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Vaccination: past and future

The prevention of infectious diseases by vaccinating children is considered a brilliant medical achievement, perhaps the greatest in medical history. In countries where vaccinations are being implemented, a gradual reduction of morbidity and mortality attributed to life-threatening diseases has been observed.

Diseases such as smallpox have been eradicated, while cases of polio, diphtheria and tetanus are rarely recorded. Indicatively, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 2 million child deaths were prevented by vaccination in 2003. The main objectives are global immunization coverage and protection of the youngest. Delaying vaccination can have a huge negative impact at both personal and community levels, because it can lead to epidemic outbreaks, such as of pertussis. According to the panHellenic vaccination coverage of 2006, in Greece there is a high final vaccination coverage regarding all infectious diseases, but a delayed vaccination for hepatitis B and the first dose of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR). Of note is that the recorded epidemic outbreaks of measles, mumps and rubella occasionally show the source of infection to be unvaccinated populations that are extremely difficult to access. Particularly interesting are the pertussis data regarding infected children, adolescents and adults (mostly the latter), where the infection is under-diagnosed.

The national vaccination program for Greece includes all the vaccines for children. Moreover, the new program schedule is focusing on the vaccination of all children, adolescents and adults. Efforts regarding the wide implementation of vaccines must be concerted and relate to the whole age range, including special population groups. Therefore, continuous effort is needed to remind the population of the importance of vaccination and the progress being made regarding infectious disease control, in order to counter any anti-vaccination opinions that can threaten the great potential of preventative medicine.

M. Papagrighoriou-Theodoridou, Professor of Pediatrics, First Department of Pediatrics, 'Aghia Sofia' General Children Hospital

Highlights

According to recent studies, vaccination coverage among health care workers, regarding certain vaccine-preventable diseases, is particularly low. Specifically, the seasonal influenza rate is approximately 20%. Vaccination of health care workers is very important, for their own protection as well as for their patients. It seems that there is appropriate information provided by the relevant authorities to promote vaccination. The public health authorities of Greece must continue their efforts to increase vaccination coverage among health professionals.

[Read more on page 2](#)

During the summer, West Nile Virus cases were significantly fewer compared with 2010. In parallel, the virus has been extended to new geographical regions (Attica, etc.). It appears that the preventive measures implemented in a joint effort by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity and the Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as other public health authorities, has had relatively good results. Therefore, efforts must be continued because the virus is now considered to be endemic in Greece.

[Read more on page 10](#)

Interesting activities

EpiSouth Plus

The first Steering Team Meeting of the EpiSouth Plus project Work Package 7 was held in Rome on 20–21 July 2011.

The EpiSouth Network includes 27 countries [nine European Union (EU) and 17 non-EU, plus one EU candidate country]. It is therefore the biggest intercountry collaborative effort of this kind in the region. Since October 2010, with the approval of a new project phase, the network has focused on increasing health security in the Mediterranean area and south-east Europe by enhancing and strengthening preparedness for common health threats and biosecurity risks at national and regional levels in the countries of the EpiSouth Network (www.episouthnetwork.org).

Work Package 7 (WP7), co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS), aims to improve the elaborations required by the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) identified among those considered as priorities in the EpiSouth region. Given its focus, this work package is also complementary with other technical work packages of the project (WP4, Mediterranean regional laboratory network; WP5, Generic preparedness plan and risk management procedures; WP6, Early warning system and cross-border epidemic intelligence) because the general aim is to reinforce surveillance and response to health threats.

The first Steering Team Meeting of WP7 took place in Rome on 20–21 July and was attended by 18 people. Participants included the WP7 Steering Team and representatives of all the project work packages. During this meeting, data for the EpiSouth region concerning IHR implementation collected by WHO were presented, and participants from nine countries provided their views on the national priorities for the acquisition of IHR core capacities.

The main outputs of the meeting were the identification of a priority area on which WP7 should focus (co-ordination of surveillance and response between points of entry and national systems) and the development of a framework for collaboration between WP7 and other work projects in the context of IHR 2005 implementation.

Dr Regina Vorou, DTM&H, Biopathologist, HCDCP

ECDC training course in typing *Listeria monocytogenes*, 15–17 June 2011, Denmark

A training course in typing *Listeria monocytogenes* with pulsed-field gel electrophoresis was held at the Department of Microbiological Surveillance and Research of Statens Serum Institut, under the supervision of the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Twenty-three hours of practical laboratory training and lectures were provided. I was trained in the laboratory protocol suggested by Pulsenet (www.pulsenet.com) for molecular typing of *L. monocytogenes*. The many lectures delivered covered topics such as the theoretical background of molecular typing, problem-solving in the laboratory application of the protocol, epidemiological surveillance and how it should be performed by the central public health laboratories, current and future actions taken by the ECDC, and many more. Furthermore, a workshop in bioinformatics was held, which covered the part of the process that follows the application of the laboratory protocol, for a complete and reliable molecular typing system.

My presence at the seminar was very useful and important, not only for me personally, as I gained considerable knowledge, but for the laboratory as well, because we routinely use pulsed-field gel electrophoresis in typing various micro-organisms, except for *L. monocytogenes*. It was an excellent opportunity to obtain important information on how to upgrade molecular typing at the Laboratory of Microbial Resistance and Molecular Typing, in order to maximize the reliability of our results.

Pappa Olga, Laboratory Technician, MSc Microbial Biotechnology, Department of Microbial Resistance and Molecular Typing, Central Public Health Laboratory, HCDCP