

Pandemic Prevention in Europe Still Flawed

- **International cooperation often mere lip service**
- **Defensive measures implemented too late in most countries**
- **General lack of coordination between human medical and veterinary measures**

Even a year since the bird flu filled European countries and people with fear, from the threat of pandemic at that time there have been no adequate consequences for the improvement of pandemic prevention or structures for battling pandemics taken into account. The tenor of analyses of the situation in- and outside the EU, which leading international experts will present at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG): there is progress, but in a wide range of areas European countries are only halfway there.

“Yesterday panic, today forgotten”, summarizes EHFG President Günther Leiner. “But pandemic prevention cannot be organized when we’re threatened with the next catastrophe; all measures have to be established as fast as possible so the population can be optimally protected in the event of new threats of pandemic. The “*nothing’s going to happen*” attitude is completely unacceptable in view of the dimension of the catastrophes which can end up in pandemics.

In a new study by the renowned research institute for epidemics and pandemics, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, whose results will be presented in detail at the EHFG, the most significant points of weakness criticized by experts are:

- **Lack of coordination between human medical and veterinary measures:** in many national crisis plans potentially necessary veterinary measures are not even rudimentarily considered. As a result, the fight against one of the most important possibilities for the spread of pandemics is culpably neglected.
- **International cooperation is often lip service:** while basically all national crisis plans contain clear declarations for close international cooperation – only a few have even lined up plans for how this international cooperation will even take place. Thus, in an emergency cooperation will function only on a very limited basis.
- **Unsuitable strategies for containing potential pandemics:** many countries seem to assume that the dangers of pandemics only come from abroad. Sufficient strategies for the early combat of epidemics with pandemic potential which break out inside the country are lacking.
- **Vaguely formulated crisis plans:** critical points are left out of many crisis plans. An example of this is the provision of vaccines. All plans recognize this as one of the key issues, but there is a lack of any developed plan for how the rapid and adequate production of vaccines can be ensured in the event of a pandemic – the same is also true for the fast provision of laboratory capacities for tests and the development of new medications and vaccines.

“As a whole, the result of the much heralded creation of modern, efficient and resilient structures for battling pandemics in Europe is not at all inspiring,” says Mr Leiner. “Certainly this has only partly to do with the associated costs, for just as problematic is the fact that health policy simply fails to accord this issue the proper degree of importance. The prevention and combat pandemics have to be granted uppermost priority.”

Leiner points out that health policy cannot consist merely of filling in gaps and urgent measures for rescue from financial collapse. “Naturally, daily problems have to be handled and solved, but in the course of this if the prevention of pandemics which ultimately threaten the entire population is neglected, then we’re playing with the lives of citizens.”

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