



Stockpiling Antivirals Helps Prepare for Influenza Pandemic

- **Spread of communicable diseases such as pandemic influenza remains significant threat to public health in Europe**
- **Despite uncertainty regarding specific kind of future viruses, stockpiling antivirals could help contain disease**
- **There is a vital need for governments to coordinate planning efforts at European and international levels**

The continuing threat of the H5N1 strain of influenza in wild and domestic poultry in Southeast Asia, and more recently in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, represents the most serious risk of a human influenza pandemic in decades. Over the last year, there have been a number of avian influenza outbreaks in wild birds and domestic poultry in European countries. In addition, there have been several cases of human infection in Turkey. Although there is no absolute certainty that an influenza pandemic will be caused by avian flu, these factors nonetheless contribute to increasing concerns that there may be a pandemic outbreak in Europe in the near future.

Speaking at an expert panel on the threat of modern pandemics at the European Health Forum Gastein, David Reddy, Influenza Pandemic Taskforce Leader, F. Hoffman-La Roche, outlined the role antivirals can play in containing or controlling pandemic influenza and the importance of stockpiling drugs in advance of any such pandemic outbreak. Dr. Reddy emphasized the following points:

- There is a huge range in the level of preparedness among European countries and very little collaboration on planning for an influenza pandemic
- Significant work still needs to be done on coordinating an international pandemic response
- Antivirals play a very important role in the early phase of such a pandemic, as vaccines are not immediately available
- The initial challenge for supply has been met, but industry is now facing a challenge in demand to maintain capacity
- Once stockpiles are in place, countries must also develop the ability to provide rapid access to citizens

Although experts stress it is not possible to predict which specific virus will cause the next pandemic threat, they regard the stockpiling of antivirals as an important contribution to pandemic preparedness. This corresponds to the opinion of the World Health Organization (WHO), which has advised that “stockpiling drugs in advance is

presently the only way to ensure that sufficient supplies are available at the time of a pandemic.”

In terms of medical intervention, the stockpiling of antivirals is an extremely important factor. For instance, production of the antiviral medication Tamiflu has recently been increased to the capacity for producing up to 400 million courses of treatment annually.

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