

20 May 2005: ECDC becomes operational

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) became operational today. This memo explains the implications of this new EU agency starting its work.

The mission of the ECDC is to identify, assess and communicate current and emerging threats to human health from infectious diseases such as influenza, HIV/AIDS and SARS.

One of its key tasks in pursuing this mission is to reinforce and develop the European Union's existing systems of continent-wide disease surveillance and early warning. In the past few weeks the ECDC has established contact with national disease surveillance authorities throughout the EU and the EEA/EFTA countries, as well as with the WHO. The Centre has also begun work on strategic plans to reinforce Europe-wide disease surveillance and disease preparedness. Today it took the crucial first step towards becoming the central hub of the EU's surveillance system when it became connected to the EU's Early Warning and Response System (EWRS). ECDC staff will assist the European Commission in monitoring the EWRS 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The ECDC also today officially declared itself ready to receive requests for scientific opinions from the EU Institutions and national governments across the EU and EEA/EFTA countries.

The ECDC will produce its scientific opinions by pooling knowledge and expertise from national public health institutes and scientists across the EU. The Centre has made rapid progress in building up its Europe-wide network of disease experts and attracting world class scientists to work in its core staff in Stockholm. Building up capacity to advise on key issues such as influenza, antibiotic resistance and HIV/AIDS is one of the ECDC's top priorities.

ECDC core staff set to grow

Mrs Zsuzsanna Jakab, formerly the senior official at the Hungarian Ministry of Health, took up her post as Director of the ECDC on 1 March this year. She rapidly assembled a small start up team of scientists and administrators working on short term contracts or on secondment from national disease control agencies.

Job advertisements for the senior scientists and administrators the Centre will need were published on the ECDC's website during March and April. Key appointments will be made over the summer and by the end of 2005 the ECDC will have a core staff of around 30 officials.

The Centre's core staff is set to grow progressively over the coming years. By 2007 the ECDC will have around 100 staff, rising to possibly as many as 300 by 2013.

Background

Enabling legislation to create the ECDC was passed by the European Parliament and Council in 2004. This legislation set Stockholm as the headquarters of the Centre, in line with the decision of EU Head of Government in December 2003 that the new agency be based in Sweden. The Centre's Management Board nominated Mrs. Jakab as the Centre's Director in December 2004 and she took up her post on 1 March this year.

Further information

<http://www.ecdc.eu.int>

or press@ecdc.eu.int