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ECDC joins campaign against TB as new figures illustrate TB emergency in eastern Europe

New figures published in the scientific journal Eurosurveillance tomorrow show an alarming rise in tuberculosis (TB) in eastern Europe. The number of TB cases reported there has been rising steadily since 1997, with twelve former Soviet states now accounting for the vast majority of TB reported in the European region. In 2004 these countries reported 291,288 TB cases out of a total of 414,163 cases reported across the region. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is joining with WHO Europe and Finland's upcoming Presidency of the European Union for a European Ministerial Forum on TB. This forum will be held in Copenhagen on 17-19 October 2006 and aims to mobilise a political response to the TB emergency in eastern Europe.

Zsuzsanna Jakab, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said:

"The continued rise of TB in the former Soviet republics cannot be allowed to continue. We are seeing the emergence there of TB strains that do not respond to antibiotics and a trend towards HIV and TB co-infection. If we want to defend public health in the European Union we must address this public health emergency on our doorstep. We must join forces to ensure all countries implement best practice, such as DOTS (directly observed treatment) and that the emergence of drug resistant TB strains is both monitored and addressed."

The purpose of the Ministerial Forum in October is to increase awareness among policy makers and the public of the TB emergency in eastern Europe. The Forum will examine an a TB Plan of Action for the WHO European Region with the aim of mobilising the political will and the funding needed to address the TB emergency in the eastern part of that region.

Official data compiled by the organisation EuroTB and published this week in the scientific journal *Eurosurveillance* show that in 2004 some 414,163 tuberculosis (TB) cases were notified by 51 countries within the WHO European Region¹. Seventy percent of all TB notifications derived from 12 countries of the former Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Rep. of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. In comparison, the 25 countries of the European Union reported a total of 58,833 TB cases in that period, less than 15% of the total for the region.

Data on drug resistance in the former Soviet countries is incomplete, but there are indications of a high level of drug resistance emerging. In some of the countries that reported treatment outcomes, around 10% of cases failed to respond to treatment, most likely as a consequence of the high prevalence of drug resistant TB strains.

Further information

The article by Dr. Dennis Falzon, Programme Coordinator of EuroTB and Dr. Jean-Claude Desenclos of the Département des Maladies Infectieuses at the Institut de Veille Sanitaire (INVS), France is published in the latest *Eurosurveillance* Weekly Release. *Eurosurveillance* has also published a Special Issue of its Monthly Release on the theme of tuberculosis and vaccination. Both are available at: www.eurosurveillance.org

For more information about the European Ministerial Forum on TB and about ECDC see www.ecdc.eu.int :

Ben Duncan, ECDC Spokesman
Email: ben.duncan@ecdc.eu.int
Tel: +46(0)708.597833

Note to Editors: Background on ECDC, EuroTB and World TB Day **Eurosurveillance**

World TB Day 2006

World TB Day takes place on 24 March. For information on activities around the world to mark World TB Day see:

http://www.stoptb.org/events/world_tb_day/2006/news_media.asp

About the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC):

ECDC is a new EU agency tasked with reinforcing Europe's defenses against infectious diseases by pooling Europe's health knowledge and fostering cooperation between national public health bodies. It is based in Stockholm and became operational in May 2005. Key areas of activities are providing scientific advice, strengthening Europe-wide disease surveillance, supporting preparedness and response to disease outbreaks.

¹ The WHO European Region comprises 52 countries. For a listing see: <http://www.eurotb.org/participants.htm> Monaco did not submit data for 2004, so the 2004 report covers only 51 countries.

About EuroTB:

EuroTB has been coordinating surveillance of tuberculosis (TB) in the 52 countries of the WHO European Region since 1996. Its overall aim is to improve the contribution of epidemiological surveillance to TB control in Europe. EuroTB's correspondents are based in the national institutions responsible for TB surveillance and provide EuroTB standardised data from national TB surveillance systems each year on a voluntary basis. The network is funded by the Health and Consumer Protection DG of the European Commission. EuroTB is a collaborating Centre of WHO for the surveillance of tuberculosis

Eurosurveillance

Eurosurveillance is a scientific journal that covers infectious disease issues from a European perspective. It publishes a weekly news bulletin on disease outbreak and disease control developments and monthly and quarterly journals containing longer scientific papers as well as news and analysis (see www.eurosurveillance.org). The journal has recently concluded a strategic partnership with ECDC under which *Eurosurveillance* will publish disease outbreak reports and data from the Centre. Eurosurveillance was founded in 1995 with financial support from the European Commission, the Institute de Veille Sanitaire (InVS), the French national public health agency, and the UK's Health Protection Agency.