

# PRESS INFORMATION



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## Taking on HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis: Commissioner Kyprianou discusses priorities for action with ECDC

***European Commissioner for Health, Markos Kyprianou, will call today for more EU level action against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (TB) at a meeting with senior officials from Member State health authorities and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Commissioner Kyprianou will also call on ECDC to ensure comprehensive surveillance of HIV/AIDS in the entire EU. ECDC would be expected to detect best practice in HIV prevention in Member States and elsewhere, share it in order to help improve national AIDS programmes and report back to the Commissioner on progress achieved and on areas where Member States may need more support. Speaking in the run up to World TB Day (24 March), Commissioner Kyprianou will also call on Member States to take more action on TB and on ECDC to develop an EU action plan to assist Member States in the fight against TB.***

Speaking ahead of the meeting, Commissioner Kyprianou said: "Fighting the resurgence of HIV/AIDS in Europe has become a top priority for the EU in recent years. I fully endorse the declaration from the German Presidency's HIV/AIDS conference in Bremen last week and look forward to EU Heads of Government debating HIV/AIDS at the European Council. EU countries need to work together to ensure comprehensive surveillance of this disease and to review strategies and actions that are most effective in fighting HIV/AIDS."

"Though the overall prevalence of TB in the EU is among the lowest in the world, TB among vulnerable populations in the EU has increased. The threat from drug resistant TB strains should not be underestimated. Cooperation against this disease can save lives and prevent suffering. Targeting vulnerable groups, preventing drug-resistance, focussing more on preventive measures and remaining vigilant in countries with low incidence will be of pivotal importance in limiting the impact of TB in the EU."

Zsuzsanna Jakab, Director of ECDC noted that "ECDC is building up its activities in the areas of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Both diseases are priorities for us, and we are keen to support the initiatives called for by Commissioner Kyprianou."

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## Tuberculosis in the EU

The annual report of the Commission funded network EuroTB, due to be published on Thursday 22 March, will show that TB rates in the EU decreased by 2.5% annually between 2001 and 2005. Nonetheless, a total of 91,845 tuberculosis cases were reported in the 27 EU Member States in 2005. While the prevalence of TB in the EU is low by international standards, rates of infection have increased among certain vulnerable groups. These include HIV/AIDS infected persons and people of foreign origin. In addition, some EU countries are reporting a high rate of cases of drug resistant TB. In the Baltic States 18% of TB cases are from drug resistant strains (compared to 0% to 6% in other Member States).

The key findings of the EuroTB report will be presented by ECDC's Director at a scientific seminar in the European Parliament in Brussels on 22 March. The EuroTB project is due to be integrated into the ECDC in the coming year as the Centre gradually take on responsibility for Europe-wide surveillance of infectious diseases.

## HIV/AIDS in the EU

There were over 20,000 new HIV diagnoses reported by EU countries to the EuroHIV network in 2005. This figure does not include data for a couple of large EU countries, so the actual number of new diagnoses is likely to be nearer to 30,000. The number of new diagnoses per year does not give the full picture of HIV transmission in the EU. An estimated 30% of people living with HIV in the EU are unaware they are infected. Heterosexual contact accounted for over half (55%) of newly diagnosed HIV infections in the EU in 2005, sex between men for one third (34%) and injecting drug use some 13%. However, it is important to note that nearly half (46%) of the heterosexual infections reported were diagnosed in migrants from countries with generalised epidemics (primarily countries of sub-Saharan Africa), and most of these infections were acquired outside the EU.

## Today in Stockholm

Commissioner Kyprianou will inaugurate today ECDC's headquarters building in Stockholm in the presence of Maria Larsson, Sweden's Minister for Public Health and Cecilia Malmström, Sweden's Minister for European Affairs. Immediately after the ceremony he will address the meeting of ECDC's Management Board at the Centre's offices.

## Background on ECDC

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EFTA Member States.

**For further information please visit:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/index_en.htm)

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