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Tallinn, 23 November 2007

ECDC launches European HIV/AIDS report in Tallinn and pledges support to Estonia in its fight against HIV/AIDS

The Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Zsuzsanna Jakab, today met the Estonian Minister for Social Affairs, Maret Maripuu, and praised the political commitment shown by Estonia to tackling its HIV/AIDS epidemic. New data released by Mrs Jakab during her visit to Tallinn showed that Estonia has the highest rate of new HIV diagnosis in Europe, with 504 new cases reported per million inhabitants in 2006. The average rate of new HIV diagnosis across Europe is approximately 111 per million inhabitants, with a lower average rate of 67 per million inhabitants reported in the European Union countries. Nonetheless, a team of ECDC experts who visited Estonia earlier this year were impressed by the efforts being made by Estonia to tackle its epidemic and emphasised the need for continued action. The EuroHIV data released today in Tallinn also showed that in 2006 a total of 86,912 new HIV infections were reported across 50 of the 53 countries of the WHO European Region, with a total of 26,220 (30%) reported in the EU countries. A summary of the data is available in ECDC's scientific journal Eurosurveillance (www.eurosurveillance.org)

At the launch of the *HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe* report in Tallinn, Estonia, ECDC's Director, Zsuzsanna Jakab, said:

"In response to the high levels of HIV infection being reported, Estonia has launched an ambitious long-term plan for 2006-2015. This plan includes new initiatives on surveillance, prevention and treatment. We at ECDC are supportive of the work being done by the Estonian government to reverse the trend of increasing HIV infection rates. On behalf of ECDC, I have pledged to support Estonia in a number of priority areas, including on surveillance, sharing country experiences and providing European guidance on HIV testing".

Increasing share of sexual transmission across Europe

In 2006, over two thirds of the new HIV diagnoses in Europe were reported in the former Soviet Union countries (the East of Europe) (59,866 cases; 211 per million inhabitants), of which 41% were female and 27% were young people (15-24 years of age). The predominant mode of HIV transmission was injecting drug use (22,185 cases) although there has been a five-fold increase in heterosexually-acquired cases since 1999. In the West of Europe 25,241 new HIV diagnoses were reported in 2006 (82.5 per million

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inhabitants) of which 35% were female and 10% aged 15-24 years old. The predominant mode of transmission was heterosexual (10,722), with approximately 43% of cases originating from countries with a generalised epidemic (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa). Since 1999, the number of new HIV diagnoses reported among heterosexuals and among men who have sex with men increased two-fold. In the Centre of Europe, small numbers of new HIV diagnoses were reported in 2006 (1,805; 9.4 per inhabitants), of which heterosexual transmission was predominant (52%). Definitions of East, West and Centre are given below.

ECDC focus on HIV Testing

ECDC estimates that about 30% of people living with HIV in Europe are unaware they are infected. These people are less likely to take precautions against transmitting the virus, and are also unable to access treatment. Addressing this hidden epidemic is a priority for ECDC. In 2008, the ECDC will be working to identify and address potential barriers to HIV testing. It is anticipated that higher testing rates across Europe will link more HIV infected people to prevention and treatment services.

Background information on HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe

HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe is a report prepared by EuroHIV (European Centre for the Epidemiological Monitoring of HIV and AIDS) a network currently hosted by the French Institute of Public Health (Institut de Veille Sanitaire). The report presents information provided by the national coordinators for the surveillance of HIV/AIDS in the WHO European Region. From 1 January 2008, ECDC will be hosting the network coordination activities. The surveillance of HIV/AIDS in Europe will be continued jointly by ECDC and WHO Euro.

Background information on ECDC and *Eurosurveillance*

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. From March 2007 ECDC took over the production of *Eurosurveillance* a peer-reviewed scientific journal on communicable diseases in Europe. *Eurosurveillance* is published online in weekly and monthly editions.

The countries covered by the report are grouped as follows:

- West, 23 countries: Andorra, Austria*, Belgium*, Denmark*, Finland*, France*, Germany*, Greece*, Iceland, Ireland*, Israel, Italy*, Luxembourg*, Malta*, Monaco, Netherlands*, Norway, Portugal*, San Marino, Spain*, Sweden*, Switzerland, United Kingdom*;
- Centre, 15 countries : Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria*, Croatia, Cyprus*, Czech Republic*, Hungary*, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland*, Romania*, Serbia, Slovakia*, Slovenia*, Turkey.
- East, 15 countries of the former Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia*, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia*, Lithuania*, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation,

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Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan;

* Countries which constitute the European Union as of 1 January 2007

Further information

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Link to recent Estonian HIV prevention TV spot (available in English):
<http://www.dieyoung2.com/>