

Rapid communications

EURO 2008 - PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP IN AUSTRIA

R Strauss (reinhold.strauss@bmgfj.gv.at)¹, R Muchl¹, C Hain¹, Hubert Hrabcik¹

1. Directorate of Public Health, Federal Ministry for Health, Family and Youth, Vienna, Austria

The European Football Championship 2008 (EURO 2008) is jointly organised by Switzerland and Austria and will take place between 7 and 29 June 2008. The Austrian Public Health Service is making special preparations for a potential public health crisis during this mass gathering, which is expected to have around 550,000 spectators [1].

In the area of infectious diseases, the rapid detection and control of outbreaks are essential. Therefore, a concept for surveillance and control was developed and optimised in collaboration with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and with the Robert Koch institute (RKI) in Germany. It incorporated the experiences gained during the Football World Cup in Germany in 2006 as well as the Olympic Games in Greece in 2004. At these events, it had become clear that food safety in particular, as well as international collaboration in this area, were essential factors.

Syndromic Surveillance, i.e. the early reporting of symptoms such as respiratory symptoms, was not considered to be a necessary measure to be implemented in the specific context of the event. It was not applied in Germany in 2006, where enhancing traditional surveillance systems was considered sufficient to cover the need in relation with the event. The reason for this was the experience with other mass gatherings where the collection of syndromic surveillance information developed specifically for the event involved an enormous effort regarding reporting and documentation, and did not lead to detection of outbreaks at an early stage [2].

Measures planned in Austria for EURO 2008 include:

- **Training:** A workshop dealing with mass gatherings will be run by the ECDC and the RKI for the Austrian health authorities and the food safety sector. Swiss colleagues will be invited to participate.
- **Reporting (enhanced surveillance):** The health authorities at the participating sites will send information on outbreaks and special events daily. In addition, the reference laboratories will report daily on potential clusters of confirmed cases in order to support the identification of outbreaks (including inter-regional and international outbreaks).
- **Increased awareness among the reporting doctors:** Doctors in hospitals and practices will be asked to report infectious diseases or possible outbreaks rapidly.
- **A legionella crisis plan** will be developed by all regional health boards.
- **24/7 on-call duty:** The Austrian Federal Ministry for Health, Family and Youth (BMGFJ), the regional health boards of the

participating localities and the relevant national reference laboratories will be on duty around the clock.

- Lists of **contact persons** of the health and food safety authorities (national and regional) as well as of all relevant organisations such as the Austrian Medical Association, Association of Austrian Pharmaceutical Companies, Red Cross and other organisations have been updated to be used by the Ministry of Health crisis team.
- **Crisis centre and communication:** A daily meeting is planned, including teleconferences with the ECDC and the relevant regional health boards, and briefings with the food safety sector (as well as with the veterinary sector, if necessary).
- **Information:** A log book will be kept containing the daily notifications and the situation regarding infectious diseases in the European Union and the other countries participating in the championship. The basis for this information will be the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), the Rapid Alert System for Biological and Chemical Alerts and Threats (RAS-BICHAT), the Medical Intelligence System of the European Commission (MEDISys) and the Health Emergencies and Diseases Surveillance System (HEDIS). In addition, a dedicated web portal with restricted access for health authorities will be established.

References

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