

# PREPARATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP (EURO 2008) IN SWITZERLAND

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The European football championship (EURO 2008) is taking place in Austria and Switzerland between 7 and 29 June 2008. From a public health point of view, such a mass gathering requires attention with regard to infectious disease prevention because of (i) a potential increased risk for disease transmission (ii) increased media attention and (iii) its potential as a target for actions of a bioterrorist nature [2,6,8,9]. This article gives an overview of the preparations for Euro 2008 on the national level in Switzerland with regards to infectious diseases.

Based on the experiences gained during the Football World Cup in Germany in 2006 and other major international sporting events [1-9], the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) in Switzerland is preparing to deal with various scenarios and incidents involving infectious diseases, such as food-borne outbreaks or cases of meningitis, by strengthening prevention surveillance, crisis management and communication.

According to the federal political system in Switzerland, public health tasks are shared between the national and cantonal public health authorities. Notifications by physicians and laboratories are made to the cantonal health authorities and are forwarded to the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH). The main responsibility for preparedness, interventions and disease control is taken by the cantonal authorities. Cantons of cities that are hosting football games have therefore established their own preparedness and intervention plans for Euro 2008. Based on the regular analysis of the notifications, the FOPH implements and coordinates preventive, alert and early response measures at the national level and reports to international health authorities. The national communicable diseases surveillance is coordinated by the FOPH and includes:

- A mandatory laboratory- and physician-based reporting system for 43 notifiable infectious diseases with a notification delay of two hours (e.g. SARS, botulism, H5N1 or anthrax), 24 hours (e.g. measles, meningitis, poliomyelitis, rabies, clusters of cases\* and unusual events\*\*) or one week (e.g. HIV, tuberculosis or legionellosis);
- A sentinel surveillance system based on primary healthcare physicians voluntarily reporting on seasonal flu, Bordetella pertussis and other topics;
- An early warning and information network (EWIN) which retrieves data on a daily basis from international electronic information tools (ProMed, the Global Public Health Intelligence Network GPHIN, the Health Emergencies and Diseases Surveillance System (HEDIS), etc.), from the media and from national crisis information networks;
- A crisis management team.

EURO 2008-specific activities are planned and implemented in the following areas:

- **Surveillance, crisis management and national coordination:** FOPH staff responsible for early warning, communicable disease surveillance, project coordination and communication will meet daily to evaluate national surveillance data and international information on infectious diseases provided by the Austrian health authorities, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). A daily report will be produced and made available to the Austrian health authorities, to ECDC, and also to the cantonal and national authorities who will ensure the information exchange with the organisers of the Euro 2008. In the case of a public health event, the crisis management organisation will become operational and national and cantonal public health partners will communicate through telephone conferences.
- **Outbreak investigation:** The content of the notification form for 'clusters of cases and unusual events' has been updated and made available on the internet. According to Swiss legislation, local infectious disease outbreaks must be reported within 24 hours. Physicians have been urged by the cantonal medical officers to use these notification forms during routine surveillance.
- **Communication:** The FOPH EURO 2008 public website (<http://www.bag.admin.ch/themen/medizin/00682/04583/index.html?lang=en>) provides information on public health topics and the epidemiological situation relevant for visitors of EURO 2008. A situation report on measles and recommendations on immunisation against measles and tick-borne encephalitis have been posted. During EURO 2008, a national telephone hotline will be available for the public to answer questions concerning infectious diseases.
- **Preparedness:** During Euro 2008, the FOPH and national reference laboratories will be on-call 24 hours a day seven days a week for international, national and cantonal (public health) authorities.
- **HIV prevention:** A team of the Swiss AIDS Federation's project 'Don Juan' ([www.don-juan.ch](http://www.don-juan.ch)) will provide information on rules of safer sex, distribute postcards with rules of 'fair play' for commercial sex, and hand out condoms to men in locations where commercial sex is available.
- **Training:** FOPH staff and cantonal chief medical officers of host cities participated in a workshop dealing with mass gatherings in Vienna in May 2008, which was organised for the Austrian health authorities and the food safety sector by the ECDC and the Robert Koch Institute, Germany.
- **Food safety:** Official food control in Switzerland is carried out by cantonal food control officers. Cantonal authorities (cantonal

chemists and cantonal medical officers) directly involved in the activities of EURO 2008 have established operational plans for effective measures in the case of food-borne disease outbreaks. The FOPH will be responsible for the coordination of cantonal actions and communication in case of an event of national concern.

\* 'Clusters of cases' are clusters of notifiable and/or non-notifiable infectious disease cases.

\*\* 'Unusual events' are events that occur suddenly, are a potential public health hazard and require public health measures.

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