

21 Recommendations

21.1 Recommendation specific to the study

The lack of blood and urine sample analysis for the cases of Bornem did not allow to observe a modification of the biological parameters. More objective medical result should have been obtained from blood and urine sample analysis, avoiding lack of information.

As the Ministry of Public Health was already heavily implicated in the Dioxine crisis, the public measures for withdrawing the implicated products were insufficient and the Coca-Cola Company itself performed nearly all soft drink analyses. It would have been better to have all analyses of the suspected products performed by neutral laboratories.

Implication of the Unit of Epidemiology came too late. As the IPH was called nearly 2 weeks after the first outbreak, we recommend a sooner involvement of the epidemiological tool in such situation.

Tools for exploring a mass sociogenic illness should be improved. Several MSI episodes already occurred previously in Belgium, and are likely to re-occur.

21.2 General recommendation on the management of such events

The identified problems during the investigation show the need for more co-ordination between all the partners (Ministry of Public Health, toxicologist, physicians, laboratory and poisoning call centre, epidemiologists) when such events occur.

As in many other countries, a central intervention epidemiology unit should receive the initial request to investigate. Intervention epidemiologists are medical specialists trained to respond and co-ordinate these investigations. The Unit of Epidemiology at the Scientific Institute of Public Health has the resources and the capacity to develop this response and co-ordination, but lacks the mandate to develop intervention epidemiology. The mandate includes a clear, legally defined, task to tackle crises in public health. This mandate should be issued and supervised by all the different (public health) authorities. To allow an immediate response, a contact person within each of these authorities should be defined. To allow supervision, a supervisory body should be installed, a role which could be taken by the High Council of Health.

Providing such a development, this intervention epidemiology unit should be able to address future management problems as the ones encountered