IN BELGIUM

Increase of influenza reports

The sentinel network of physicians from the IPH Surveillance Programme of Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) and influenza in Belgium has reported an increase of ARI and influenza-like syndromes in February 2003 (weeks 7 and 8). The incidence of influenza-like syndromes has exceeded the epidemic threshold in week 8. Virological testing indicates that influenza B virus is the dominant type (figure 1).

Figure 1: Influenza virus A and B isolated by the IPH Reference Laboratory and other virological laboratories Belgium, 2002-2003

Figure 2: Mycoplasma pneumoniae and RSV, Belgium, 2002-2003. Cases reported by sentinel laboratories
This elevation is observed after the seasonal peak of infections due to *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) that occurred in December 2002 (figure 2). The reported incidence of these two pathogens is comparable to reports from previous years. Sources: IPH Surveillance Programme of acute respiratory infections and influenza in Belgium and IPH sentinel laboratory network. Follow-up of influenza infections and further information: Dr F. Yane and F. Pierquin. Weekly reports are available on [http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemio/epien/iraen/result.htm](http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemio/epien/iraen/result.htm).

**IN EUROPE**

**Increase of measles in the Republic of Ireland**

A total of 234 cases (provisional data) of clinical measles have been notified to the National Disease Surveillance Centre in the Republic of Ireland since late November 2002 (week 48) up to mid-February 2003 (week 6). This represents a substantial increase in the number of notified measles cases when compared to the same period in the previous four years. Most recent figures available (Quarter 3, 2002) estimate national MMR1 uptake at 24 months at 73%, ranging from 64-82% in regions. Sources: Eurosurveillance, 7, 7 [http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ew/2003/030213.asp](http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ew/2003/030213.asp) and Promed [http://www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org)

**IN THE REST OF THE WORLD**

**Avian influenza virus in Hong Kong**

As of 19 February results from two laboratories have confirmed the presence of an avian influenza virus in a 9-year-old boy in Hong Kong SAR. Tests conducted in two samples from this patient have identified the virus as the strain of influenza A(H5N1). This child contracted the disease after visiting southern China last month. He has recovered and is in a stable condition. Other members of his family presented with a similar illness, and his sister and father have died. As of 20 February, the Department of Health in Hong Kong SAR confirmed that the father had been infected with the same strain of influenza A(H5N1) virus. This avian virus contains no human influenza A virus genes, meaning that the risk of person-to-person transmission is low.

A similar virus caused an outbreak in Hong Kong SAR in 1997, with 18 cases detected and six deaths. Officials then killed all 1.4 million chickens in the territory to try to wipe out the virus. The health authorities in Hong Kong SAR are continuing laboratory and epidemiological investigations to determine the source of infection of this outbreak. Further laboratory tests are being conducted.

In response to the reports of these two human cases of influenza A H5N1, the EISS (European influenza surveillance scheme) is intensifying its surveillance activities, in close co-ordination with the Communicable Diseases unit of the European Commission. The National Reference Laboratories participating in EISS are collaborating with WHO to ensure that they are prepared to screen respiratory specimens for the Hong Kong subtype. Sources: Promed [http://www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org) and EISS [http://www.eiss.org/news.cgi](http://www.eiss.org/news.cgi)