Meningococcal disease: update

In February 2003, the IPH Reference Laboratory has reported 26 cases of meningococcal disease, including 7 from serogroup C (29%) and 17 from serogroup B. One death has been reported to the Reference Laboratory, due to serogroup B. These data show again a relative decrease of serogroup C disease compared to previous seasons (figure 1).

![Figure 1: Meningococcal disease serogroup C, Belgium, per epidemiological year, 1999-2003](data:image/png;base64,iVBORw0KGgoAAAANSUhEUgAAA...)

The distribution per region is given in the table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Meningococcal cases</th>
<th>Cases serogroup B</th>
<th>Cases serogroup C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vlaanderen</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallonie</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: F. Carion, IPH Reference Laboratory.
Suspected avian influenza in Belgium

After the rapid death of 2000 chicken in a single poultry farm, cases of avian influenza are suspected in Ravels, a village near the Dutch border. The 12,000 chicken of the farm have been destroyed. The Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (AFSCA/FAVV) is investigating the problem and results of laboratory analysis are awaited to confirm or not avian influenza. The AFSCA/FAVV has recommended additional measures concerning chicken and egg transport to avoid further spread of the disease and a buffer zone has been defined. A minister decree has been issued on March 12 with temporary special measures in this field. Sources: AFSCA/FAAV (http://www.afsca.be/indexfr.htm) and Promed http://www.promedmail.org.

IN EUROPE

Human case of conjunctivitis due to avian influenza in the Netherlands

A veterinarian who visited several farms with poultry flocks infected with avian influenza developed acute conjunctivitis. The symptoms in the first eye started 30 hours after his last farm visit; within the next 24 hours similar problems occurred in the other eye. The man did not suffer from keratitis or other signs of disease.

Approximately 60 hours after the onset of symptoms, swabs were collected from both eyes. RT-PCR revealed the presence of influenza A virus H7N7. Further analysis revealed DNA sequences identical to those detected in chicken infected with avian influenza. Data show that the H7N7 virus causing the current outbreak in The Netherlands may cause conjunctivitis in humans, as was reported for other H7N7 viruses detected in the past. Source: Promed http://www.promedmail.org

IN THE REST OF THE WORLD

Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever in Mauritania

As of 8 Mar 2003, the Ministry of Health of Mauritania has reported a total of 30 cases (11 laboratory confirmed), including 6 deaths of Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever (CCHF). All cases except 3 have been reported in the city of Nouakchott, the capital. Laboratory confirmation was made by the WHO Collaborating Centre at the Institut Pasteur in Dakar, Senegal.

CCHF is a viral haemorrhagic fever that is endemic in many countries in Africa, Europe and Asia. In 2001, cases were recorded in Kosovo, Albania, Iran, Pakistan, and South Africa. It was first described in the Crimea in 1944 -- hence its name -- and is a severe disease in humans, with a high mortality rate. However human illness occurs infrequently while animal infection is more common. The virus is transmitted by ticks. Source: Promed http://www.promedmail.org