IN BELGIUM

Lyme disease in Belgium: update

In July 2003, 94 *B. burgdorferi* infections have been confirmed by the reference laboratories (UCL and KUL) and reported to the IPH. Cases are mostly concentrated in the Ardennes and the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg.

In the period January-July, the reference laboratories reported 371 cases in 2003 compared to 443 cases in 2002, which was a year with particularly high incidence, and 275 cases in 2001 (figure). However, cases reported by the network of sentinel laboratories in the same period of 2003 (N=521) show no decrease compared to 2002 (N=515). Not all cases reported through this network are confirmed.

*Borrelia burgdorferi* causes Lyme disease and is transmitted by ticks. Approximately 10% of all ticks in Europe are infected. Tick bites occur mostly when walking in high grass, for instance in the Ardennes and the Kempen region. Tick bites can be prevented by wearing protective clothes. Ticks should be removed as soon as possible. Blood testing is only indicated three weeks after the tick bite, as antibodies will not be detected before. Antibiotics are effective. Source and further details: [http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemio/epinl/index8.htm](http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemio/epinl/index8.htm) (Dutch) or [http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemio/epifr/index8.htm](http://www.iph.fgov.be/epidemio/epifr/index8.htm) (French). Follow up at the IPH. G. Ducoffre.

ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE

Brucellosis in Spain

So far this year, the provincial health district of Granada has detected 27 cases of brucellosis, a disease also known as Malta fever that affects mainly those in direct contact with animals or animal tissue. As in previous years, the majority of cases have
been detected in the north eastern and southern sanitary districts of the province, with an average of 80 cases per year. However, during May and June 2003, there was an epidemic outbreak in Motril (Granada), with at least 27 cases linked to the consumption of fresh cheese acquired directly from the farmers who produced it and sold it in the municipality. The cases of brucellosis as a result of drinking (unpasteurized) milk (most frequently goat milk), or its fresh by-products (generally cheese and sometimes cottage cheese) are ever more rare in Granada. Although there is no brucellosis vaccine for humans, there is one for the animals, which constitute its natural reservoir. Sources: http://www.promedmail.org and http://salud.enlaweb.com/ELW_ET_VIEWreg.asp?sch_Date=20030814133906.

Legionella on a cruise ship

A passenger of a cruise ship which docked in Germany after a Greenland tour has died of Legionnaires' disease according to German health authorities. The man had been treated for the disease at a hospital in Magdeburg after the Ocean Monarch, carrying 358 passengers, arrived in the northern port of Cuxhaven on 22 August 2003. 2 other passengers had contracted the disease and 6 people had shown symptoms. All passengers had left the ship on the same day. Health officials have appealed to any of the passengers suffering from flu-like symptoms to contact a doctor immediately. The 5 Belgian passengers on board of the ship have been contacted by the health authorities. Nobody showed symptoms. Sources: http://213.159.10.102/germany.asp?pad=190,205,&item_id=33735 and Promed http://www.promedmail.org.

Salmonella bareilly outbreak in England, Wales and Scotland

As of August 29 2003, 34 cases of Salmonella bareilly have been confirmed in England and Wales and 19 in Scotland, taking the number in August 2003 above the total for the whole of 2002. Health investigation teams believe there is a single source. Information from public health agencies in Australia, the US, and Europe point to exotic foods or spices from the Far East. S. bareilly has primarily been reported in Europe and Asia. It has been reported to cause infection in horses as well as humans. The incubation period is between 12 and 72 hours, with common features including diarrhoea, vomiting, and fever. It is transmitted predominantly from foodstuffs, usually meat, raw eggs, milk, and dairy products, following contamination of cooked food by raw food or the failure to achieve adequate cooking temperatures. Salmonella bareilly is normally associated with foreign travel, particularly to the Indian sub-continent, although none of the new cases has a recent travel history. Source: Promed http://www.promedmail.org.

IN THE REST OF THE WORLD

Norovirus infection on a cruise ship

An ocean liner had set out on 8 Aug 2003 from Copenhagen, Denmark, for a 16 day voyage with stops including Britain, Ireland, and Iceland. Passengers started to get ill on the 3rd day of the cruise, and eventually a total of 296 passengers and 44 crew members came down with nausea and vomiting. A norovirus infection has been suspected. The virus is highly contagious and lasts only for about 24 to 48 hours. Most probably the virus had been brought on board by one or two passengers. The
viruses are spread through food and water and close contact with infected people or things they have touched. Source: Promed [http://www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org).

**Yellow fever in South America**

As of August 16, the Venezuelan Ministry of Health has declared 17 cases of yellow fever in the states Zulia and Tachira, of which 9 died. Most victims were farm labourers. The ministry increased the surveillance and organised mass vaccination campaigns in these areas, but this has not reached the large number of labourers from Colombia who cross the frontiers daily. Other cases occurred in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru. Yellow fever is a serious viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes. The disease is endemic in Africa and Latin America. It can easily be prevented by vaccination, which protects during 10 years. Sources: [http://www.msds.gov.ve/msdsweb/index.htm](http://www.msds.gov.ve/msdsweb/index.htm) and Promed [http://www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org).

**Rift Valley Fever in Egypt**

As of 28 August 2003, WHO has received reports of 45 cases of Rift Valley Fever (RVF) including 17 deaths in Seedy Salim District, about 150 kilometres north of Cairo. All cases are Egyptian farmers. Laboratory testing has confirmed the diagnosis of RVF in clinical samples.

Rift Valley fever is a subacute or acute zoonotic disease of domestic ruminants in Africa. It is caused by a single serotype of a mosquito-borne bunyavirus. The disease occurs in climatic conditions favouring the breeding of mosquito vectors and is characterised by liver damage. The disease is most severe in sheep, goats and cattle, in which it produces abortions in pregnant animals and a high mortality rate in the newborn. Humans are susceptible to infection by handling infected material and through transmission by mosquito vectors. Mass vaccinations in ruminants are carried out annually. Source: WHO [http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003_09_02a/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003_09_02a/en/).

**Schistosomiasis epidemic in China**

The director of the National Institute for the Control of Parasitic Diseases, China, reported that during the first 6 months of 2003, approximately 200 000 people in China acquired schistosomiasis, elevating the number of infected people in the country to one million. Schistosomiasis began to spread rapidly in 1998, after the Yangtze river floods, and, according to the data, the epidemic has flared up over the past few months. The river has carried the parasite to a large portion of the territory, and it is estimated that 65 million people are at risk of acquiring the disease. Source: Promed [http://www.promedmail.org](http://www.promedmail.org).