In Belgium

Influenza epidemic threshold has been reached

The IPH-based National Influenza Centre is reporting that the increasing influenza activity has now reached the epidemic threshold (week 48). The influenza sentinel physician network coordinated by the IPH is reporting every case of influenza-like illnesses and acute respiratory infections during the flu season. This week, the proportion of influenza-like illnesses on the total number of medical visits has sharply increased to reach around 5%, exceeding the epidemic threshold set at 3% (defined on the basis of previous year epidemiology). The number of viruses isolated by the Influenza Centre laboratory has also dramatically increased, from N=13 in week 46 to N=50 in week 48 (figure). All provinces are affected. The disease is especially affecting children and young people. Outbreaks have been reported in families and schools. See more details on the IPH website http://www.iph.fgov.be/flu.

Elsewhere in Europe

Mumps cases at highest level for a decade in UK

Cases of mumps are at the highest levels for almost a decade in the UK. So far this year, there have been more than 2000 formal notifications of the disease in England, at least half of them thought to be positive. In Wales there have been 323 confirmed cases, compared with just 2 in 1999.

Public health doctors have warned that in some areas, one child in 5 starting primary school this year was not protected against the disease. The massive rise in mumps cases is a cause of huge concern for health officials, who have seen the take-up of the triple measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination drop alarmingly because of health scares. Source: Promed (http://www.promedmail.org).

Cluster of tetanus in injecting drug users in England

Seven cases of clinical tetanus, including 1 death, have now been reported in injecting drug users (IDUs) in the west of England since July 2003, 6 of which occurred since October 2003. The cases, 4 women and 3 men, are aged between 20 and 47 years, and the latest reported onset date was 17 Nov 2003. 2 of the cases are known to be unimmunized, and one case is known to have received a dose of tetanus toxoid 9 years ago.

Potential sources for tetanus infection in IDUs are contaminated drugs and contaminated skin. The source of infection in this incident is not known. The close clustering of recent cases suggests contamination of drugs, either the drug itself or an adulterant. Further cases are expected if there is a continuing source of contamination.

Increased awareness of tetanus in IDUs is therefore extremely important. Advice to injecting drug users on tetanus has already been cascaded to consultants in communicable disease control, drug action teams, accident and emergency units, and to infectious diseases and intensive care specialists. Source: Promed (http://www.promedmail.org).

In the Rest of the World

December 1: World AIDS day 2003

The AIDS epidemic claimed an estimated 3 million lives in 2003, and an estimated 5 million people acquired the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in 2003 - bringing to 40 million the estimated number of people globally living with the virus. These are the latest estimates published in the recently released UNAIDS/World Health Organization annual report "AIDS epidemic update 2003", available on http://www.unaids.org/Unaids/EN/Resources/Publications/Corporate+publications/AIDS+epidemic+update++December+2003.asp