

## EU states to share swine flu vaccine

The European Commission has abandoned plans for an EU-led vaccination programme. An alternative scheme is now proposed whereby EU states may share scarce supplies of H1N1 vaccine.

The realisation that one shot of pandemic vaccine, not two, is likely to suffice for most people means governments that placed early orders could have excess stocks while others face a shortage or even a complete lack of vaccine. Britain, for example, ordered enough vaccine to give two doses to its population. Some countries have already included a provision in contracts with manufacturers stating that unused vaccines can be sold to other countries.

Leading flu vaccine manufacturers including CSL, GlaxoSmithKline, Novartis, sanofi-aventis and Sinovac have all found their H1N1 vaccines give good protection after just one dose, confounding expectations that two shots would be needed.

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## Trouble brewing over alcohol

Sweden currently holds the presidency of the EU and has a strong domestic record of aggressively tackling alcohol abuse. Backed by evidence from 13 studies showing that marketing affects levels of heavy drinking the Swedes have scheduled an update of the EU's alcohol strategy as a top priority. This has led to a fight with the brewing industry, concerned about the impact of new measures on the viability of its business at a time of economic uncertainty.

The EU position on alcohol and health is that the burden of disease and injury attributable to alcohol is estimated to be between 8% and 10% of total health expenditure [1]. Sweden does not want to introduce legislation, but to strengthen and implement the alcohol strategy, which focuses on reducing harm to young people and the elderly. Reducing advertising to the young and stiffening prices would be the main weapons.

The brewing industry has reacted by highlighting the benefits of moderate drinking, which include reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Moreover, the beer industry says it provides 2.5 million jobs when indirect employment is included. The production and sale of beer brings Euros 59 billion to Europe's economy, with a further Euros 57 billion collected by governments in beer tax revenues.

1. [ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/alcohol/alcohol\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_en.htm)

## BioBanking

Collections of biological materials such as DNA, tissues, cells or blood can be stored in biobanks to help scientists conduct research. Samples are usually anonymised or coded so that researchers cannot identify the individual whose tissue or blood they are working with.

There are at least over 100 biobanks dotted across Europe, but the system for collecting and using the material varies significantly from country to country. In 2008, the Biobanking and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure was set up, with an initial budget of Euros 5 million to improve coordination between biobanks.

Experts, meeting in Brussels on 16 September 2009, said Europe is a world leader in the field but needs a more cohesive network of biobanks in order to attract pharmaceutical firms, some of which have moved to Asia recently. Access to biological materials is essential to exploiting technology for the benefit of academia and the pharmaceutical industry. The group aims to harmonise standards in the collection and usage of biomaterials.

The European group is likely to implement new OECD guidelines on the collection of biomaterials, marking its intentions to lead on a global scale.

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## Help for dementia

Around 7.3 million people in the EU have dementia, with Alzheimer's disease accounting for 70% of all cases. As life expectancy increases, the number of people affected could double in 20 years. The European Commission is proposing better coordination on how to tackle dementia, concerned that national governments are not doing enough to treat and care for sufferers. In addition, European countries are also invited to pool their resources and coordinate their research efforts in the field of neurodegenerative diseases.

Twenty European countries have agreed to collaborate on neurodegenerative diseases, including non-EU members, Switzerland and Turkey. This will be the first outing for the EU's 'joint programming' process, created last year to avoid overlaps in research and make better use of public money. Programmes must be voluntary and tackle 'a European or global challenge'. The dementia project will be watched carefully to see if the EU can cooperate on research into other big issues, from climate change to food supply. Low-carbon technologies could be the next venture for this type of joint work.

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