



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

EU funds new research project to respond to unexpected epidemic threats such as E.coli

Brussels, 9 August 2011 - The European Commission has decided to allocate an additional €12 million from the EU's Research Framework Programme to reinforce Europe's capacity for tackling pathogens like the virulent Escherichia coli (E.coli) bacteria that recently infected close to 4,000 people in Europe and killed 46. This autumn, a cross-border consortium called ANTIGONE will start work on research aimed at getting as full a scientific picture as possible of the new E. coli strain – to which approximately €2.1 million will be specifically dedicated - and of a range of other virulent pathogens that could pose a threat to human health. By better understanding these pathogens, scientists can go on to develop ways to tackle them - the research will focus on ways to prevent future epidemics and deal with new outbreaks. The consortium will work in close collaboration with another project selected for funding earlier, PREDEMICS.

Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, said: *"Our policy is to focus EU research and innovation funding on the things that matter most to Europeans and of course health is right at the top of that list. So I am very pleased that we have been able to allocate this additional funding to reinforce further Europe's capacity to identify and respond to epidemic outbreaks "*.

ANTIGONE – ANTICIPATING the Global Onset of Novel Epidemics, is currently scheduled to involve 14 partners from seven countries. The project will gather specific expertise on a broad range of viruses and bacteria, including Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC). ANTIGONE will build the knowledge and gather the resources to help identify, study, prevent and counteract unexpected new epidemic threats. In particular, the project aims to identify the factors that make viral and bacterial pathogens from animals prone to cross the species barrier and be transmitted among people. When new and unknown diseases emerge, ANTIGONE will be able to perform and coordinate analysis of the bacteria or viruses involved and of the epidemiology of the disease concerned and the way it is transmitted. The project will also try to identify possible ways of eradicating disease and draw lessons that may help prevent threats in the future.

Background

In recent months, Germany endured one of the largest outbreaks of haemolytic uremic syndrome and bloody diarrhoea caused by enterohaemorrhagic Escherichia coli, also referred to as Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC). Figures updated by the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC) on 27 July refer to 46 people having died from STEC, 45 of them in Germany.

The Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) activated immediately the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) and the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS). These networks ensured a rapid distribution of information throughout the EU on both possible food sources and human cases.

The Directorate-General for Research and Innovation has a long track-record of supporting high-quality research projects that build the scientific tools needed to respond to emerging epidemics.

The overall portfolio of research on emerging epidemics, with a budget of well over €170 million under FP7 (2007-2013), includes work on improving capacity to detect new unknown emerging viruses (project [EMPERIE](#)), on developing drugs against any virus (project [SILVER](#)) and on limiting transmission of several vector-borne emerging diseases (project [EDENext](#)), like West Nile or Dengue fever, Chikungunya etc.

The European Commission has previously funded research on pathogenic enterohaemorrhagic E. coli, mainly on the food and water safety aspects.

Two proposals recently submitted to the Commission in response to a "call for proposals" (invitation to bid for funding) for research on epidemics were assessed as excellent. The first one was the PREDEMICS proposal - Preparedness, Prediction and Prevention of Emerging Zoonotic Viruses with Pandemic Potential using Multidisciplinary Approaches. This project focuses on four families of viruses with an epidemic potential in Europe: influenza, hepatitis E, rabies, diseases caused by rabies-related lyssaviruses and infections caused by the Japanese encephalitis virus or the West Nile virus.

With the allocation, in the light of recent events, of another €12 million in EU funding to this field of research, the ANTIGONE project can now also be funded. It will integrate research on STEC with other bacteria and viruses, such as Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic fever, Ebola, SARS, plague, Q-fever, etc.

The project will also include a "flexibility clause" that allows for a quick response to any future unexpected human epidemic threat without the need for the Commission to issue a new call for proposals.

ANTIGONE and PREDEMICS will work in close collaboration.

Annex – scheduled participants

Coordinator of ANTIGONE

Prof.dr. Thijs Kuiken, DVM, PhD, DACVP
Erasmus Medical Center, Netherlands
Professor of Comparative Pathology
Tel: +31 (0)10-7044066
e-mail: t.kuiken@erasmusmc.nl

Other participants*

2. INSTITUT PASTEUR, France
3. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS, United Kingdom
4. UNIVERSITAETSKLINIKUM BONN, Germany
5. THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, United Kingdom
6. UNIVERSIDAD DE CASTILLA - LA MANCHA, Spain
7. Zoological Society of London, Institute of Zoology, United Kingdom
8. Academisch Medisch Centrum bij de Universiteit van Amsterdam, Netherlands
9. FRIEDRICH LOEFFLER INSTITUT - BUNDESFORSCHUNGSINSTITUT FUER TIERGESUNDHEIT, Germany
10. ARISTOTELIO PANEPISTIMIO THESSALONIKIS, Greece
11. Biologicke centrum AV CR, v. v. i., Czech Republic
12. INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA SANTE ET DE LA RECHERCHE MEDICALE, France
13. CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE, France
14. WESTFAELISCHE WILHELMS-UNIVERSITAET MUENSTER, Germany

Coordinator of PREDEMICS

Pr. Sylvie van der WERF
Unité de Génétique Moléculaire des Virus à ARN
Institut Pasteur
25, rue du Dr Roux
75724 PARIS Cedex 15
Tel: +33 1 45 68 87 22/25
Email: sylvie.van-der-werf@pasteur.fr

Other participants *

- 2 ISTITUTO ZOOPROFILATTICO SPERIMENTALE DELLE VENEZIE, Italy
- 3 KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN, Belgium
- 4 UNIVERSITE DE LA MEDITERRANEE D'AIX-MARSEILLE II, France
- 5 Eidgenössisches Volkswirtschaftsdepartement, Switzerland
- 6 IMPERIAL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND MEDICINE, United Kingdom
- 7 AGENCE NATIONALE DE SECURITE SANITAIRE DE L'ALIMENTATION, DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET DU TRAVAIL, France
- 8 MAX PLANCK GESELLSCHAFT ZUR FOERDERUNG DER WISSENSCHAFTEN E.V., Germany
- 9 FUNDACIO D'INVESTIGACIO SANITARIA DE LES ILLES BALEARS RAMON LLULL, Spain
- 10 SMITTSKYDDSIKSTITUTET, Sweden
- 11 PHILIPPS UNIVERSITAET MARBURG, Germany
- 12 ISTITUTO NAZIONALE MALATTIE INFETTIVE L.SPALLANZANI – IRCCS, Italy
- 13 THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, United Kingdom
- 14 FONDAZIONE ISTITUTO PER L'INTERSCAMBIO SCIENTIFICO, Italy
- 15 Fondation Health Sciences e-Training, Switzerland
- 16 ISTITUTO SUPERIORE DI SANITA, Italy

* Participation is subject to final contractual agreement on the project

Contacts :

[Mark English](#) (+32 2 296 24 10)

[Monika Wcislo](#) (+32 2 298 65 95)