European Green Party
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Adopted resolution

PANDEMIC OF A H1N1 2009 VIRUS – A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH

Since April 2009 we have known about the pandemic caused by A H1N1 2009 virus. Alarmed by previous experience, the European Union created the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in 2005. This centre helps provide national programmes with expertise and scientific advice. Based on its recommendations, the European Commission has adopted a strategy paper setting out key public health priorities and actions in EU countries for the pandemic caused by A H1N1 2009 virus.

In its strategy paper the European Commission points out in September 2009 that vaccination remains the most effective means of preventing the spread of A H1N1 2009 virus and that it is important to make sure that all support is given to Member States in procuring vaccines. It recommends preventing the probable economic and social effects of the pandemic that could cause "potential increase of morbidity and mortality rate, lower productivity and decline in economic sectors involving close physical contact such as tourism, leisure activities and retail shopping".
However in many countries specialists and professionals insist on the importance of exploring negative side-effects of the vaccination thoroughly before using it. Clinical trials are still underway. Recommendations to risk groups like pregnant women and infants will need special care in order to avoid the risk that may arise from the use of preservatives in multi-dose packages of the vaccine.

Public authorities should base decisions about mass vaccinations on balanced research on both positive as well as adverse effects of the vaccine that are similar to that of seasonal flu. Apart from temporary side-effects, serious allergic reactions and the severe paralytic illness called GBS (GUILLAN-BARRE-SYNDROM) are possible.

While mass-vaccination of at risk groups can be recommended in other epidemic or pandemic situations, the A H1N1 2009 virus is characterised without doubt by its high infectiousness but equally its low virulence. This means that the number of deaths caused by the A H1N1 2009 virus is, up to now, well below the number of deaths caused by seasonal flu.

The results of studies monitoring the evolution of A H1N1 2009 virus infections in the Southern Hemisphere can be a useful pint of reference because it struck there first and the flu season has come to its end. In any of those countries the real impact of the disease turned out to be less than expected.

GREENS ask for a responsible approach in dealing with the pandemic caused by A H1N1 2009 virus that weighs the risks caused by the serious adverse effects of the vaccination and the relatively low risk that the virus infection presents to human health. Enormous quantities of vaccines have already been ordered. Public authorities should be responsible in their vaccination policy. Also they should be generous in providing developing countries with vaccines if those countries ask for it.

Prevention should in this case consist mainly of information and instructions about hygiene and protective measures, in order to avoid causing panic and over-reaction that could lead to the further isolation of already marginalised sectors of the population.

GREENS also want serious attention to be paid to the consequences of systematic and indiscriminate treatment of A H1N1 2009 virus and other strains with OSELTAMIVIR, which leads to resistance in a majority of cases and is currently subject to follow-up investigation by the WHO for this reason. Adverse effects are being closely scrutinised. Effects such as hepatitis, renal failure, severe allergic reactions, Stevens-Johnson-Syndrome, toxic epidermal necrosis, neurological effects.... have been observed in patients under OSELTAMIVIR treatment. Its efficiency in reducing the risk of aggravation in flu infections still needs to be proven.

In general, previous experience of pandemic A H1H1 and other epidemic or pandemic situations clearly shows that research must focus on finding out about all man-made causes like:

- lack of safety measures of laboratories;
- the influence of industrial animal breeding;
- The influence of genetically modified organisms.

General global warming is likely to cause the spread of epidemic and endemic deceases like some virus strains or malaria from the south to the northern regions and will finally force all public actors to encourage research in these fields that have been neglected before now by the private pharmaceutical sector because it was not lucrative enough.

In this context, Greens demand that the EU focuses its efforts on new objectives for research programmes and the intervention of the public health sector in order to be prepared for the situation that is ahead of us.