

INTRODUCTION

EUROHEP.NET is a feasibility project focusing on the surveillance and prevention of vaccine preventable hepatitis in the EU countries, Associated States (AS), Israel, Norway and Turkey. This concerted action, which is coordinated by the University of Antwerp (Centre for the Evaluation of Vaccination, Dept. Epidemiology and Social Medicine) is granted by DG Research of the European Commission (QLK2-2002-01579) for a duration of 36 months, starting September 1st, 2002.

Hepatitis B has been documented to be a serious threat to the public health in the European region, with low to intermediate endemicity in the EU countries and Associated States, despite the availability of safe and effective vaccines since more than 20 years.

Furthermore, several countries are in a transitional epidemiological situation of decreasing endemicity for hepatitis A, with difficult decisions on implementation of hepatitis A immunization programmes. With the enlargement of Europe and the increasing travel and migration rates, the probability increases that hepatitis A and B will spread over the borders and involve more countries.

Most of the participating countries have systems for surveillance in place, but wide differences between case-definition, and the completeness and methods of reporting exist.

The aim of this international project is to take stock, coordinate, strengthen and standardise the country-specific surveillance and prevention activities of viral hepatitis A and B. The primary objective is to study the feasibility of a future European network on surveillance of hepatitis A and B, integrating expertise from Public Health Institutes, the Ministries of Health and academia involved in infectious disease surveillance activities in the respective countries.

During the first phase (September 2002-March 2004) EUROHEP.NET has addressed issues related to surveillance and prevention of hepatitis A and B in the EU countries, AS and Israel: 20 countries participated in an electronic survey: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, England and Wales, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia. Additionally, Norway and Turkey joined the project in April 2004.

Retrospective data on surveillance and prevention of vaccine preventable viral hepatitis were collected for the period 1990-2001 and are available for 22 countries for hepatitis A and B. As one of the planned results, this publication assembles in poster format the country specific data on hepatitis A and B (2 posters per country) and overviews concerning specific items: surveillance systems, used case definitions, burden of disease, vaccination effectiveness and programmes.

This EUROHEP.NET information will become publicly available by spring 2005 on the EUROHEP.NET website: <http://www.eurohep.net>.

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