



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Note for the Media WHO/28
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WHO INFLUENZA PANDEMIC TASK FORCE HOLDS FIRST MEETING

Geneva - The World Health Organization (WHO) Influenza Pandemic Task Force (IPTF) met for the first time on 25 September at WHO Headquarters in Geneva.

The Task Force, whose current full membership is 21 members, has been established to comply with the 2006 World Health Assembly Resolution (http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA59/WHA59_2-en.pdf). It will advise WHO on potential public health issues of international concern related to avian and pandemic influenza, including issues such as the appropriate phase of pandemic alert, the declaration of an influenza pandemic, and appropriate international response measures to a pandemic.

The Task Force is a temporary body which will advise WHO until the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR) come into force on 15 June 2007. At that time, an emergency committee will be convened if and when needed to advise WHO on disease events of international public health importance, but the creation of this temporary Task Force already allows WHO to begin implement the spirit of the IHR.

"The International Health Regulations (IHR) are a key element in strengthening global health security. By bringing this group of experts together and ensuring that we have established effective means of working together when disease outbreaks occur, we can ensure that we are getting both the best advice for WHO and building a platform of shared knowledge and ability to respond to rapidly-evolving health emergencies worldwide" said Dr Guenael Rodier, WHO Director responsible for the coordination of IHR implementation.

The 25 September meeting covered administrative issues such as roles and responsibilities and set out how meetings would be run. In urgent situations, based on specific public health events, most future meetings would probably be "virtual", held via tele- or video-conference because of the need for a quick turnaround time. Participants began discussion on the types of information which would be relevant for their deliberations.

The Task Force further agreed that, in the period until 15 June 2007, it will also serve a second function: as an expert advisory group to WHO's Global Influenza Programme (GIP). Following 15 June 2007, two separate bodies will function as needed - an IHR emergency committee, to be convened if and when necessary, and an expert advisory group to GIP.

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"We welcome the fact that the Task Force is up and running. It will complement other technical partnerships and networks, such as the Global Outbreak and Response Network (GOARN) and the Global Influenza Surveillance Network (GISN), and ensure that the IHR, when they come into force, move quickly from being simply a legal framework to being a functional support to our efforts to improve global health security," added Dr Mike Ryan, Director of WHO's Department for Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response.

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