

**Note for the Media WHO/32  
23 October 2007**

## **WHO URGES GREATER GLOBAL EFFORT ON SAFE INJECTIONS**

**Geneva, 23 October 2007** - In an effort to improve injection safety across the globe, the World Health Organization (WHO) today began a 3-day meeting with experts to explore strategies aimed at promoting the use of safer needles.

The annual meeting of the Safe Injection Global Network (SIGN), taking place at WHO headquarters in Geneva 23-25 October, brings together UN agencies, donors, experts, countries and industry. It will examine how best to encourage countries and procurement agencies to purchase the safest needles, how to encourage manufacturers to lower the price of such products, and how to boost countries' local manufacturing capacity.

WHO estimates that every year, 6 billion injections are given globally with syringes or needles that are reused without sterilization. This represents 40% of all injections given in developing countries; in some countries, the proportion is as high as 70% of injections.

Since 1999, WHO has advised its Member States to use needles with safety features. However, most countries cannot afford these new technologies. Less sophisticated needles cost 3 US cents, compared with 15 US cents for more advanced, safer devices.

"The new technologies should be available to developing countries, where injections are used more and where the risk of infection transmission is greater," said Dr Howard Zucker, Assistant Director-General for Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals at WHO.

According to WHO figures, unsafe injections and needle stick injuries suffered by health-care workers together cause 33% of new Hepatitis B infections and two million new cases of Hepatitis C in the world each year. In addition, unsafe injections in health-care settings account for an estimated 5% of new HIV cases worldwide.

The use of syringes with features that prevent reuse and needle stick injuries would avert about 1.3 million global deaths per year by preventing infections and the epidemics caused by their spread, WHO estimates.

### **Actions by WHO**

To promote the purchase of the safest injection devices by countries and procurement agencies, WHO will continue to provide up-to-date data and guidance to those creating policy and advocacy tools.

WHO will discuss with manufacturers possible ways to lower the price of safer injection devices, including helping countries to forecast their needs. This should promote price reductions by increasing demand and helping industry plan manufacturing volumes.

To enhance manufacturing capacity in developing countries, WHO plans to facilitate and promote agreements between companies for the exchange of knowledge and technology. The organization would further ease the interaction between local manufacturers and the two umbrella organizations for injection device manufacturers: International Association for Safe Injection Technology (IASIT) and the European Medical Technology Industry Association (EUCOMED). These organizations could help by sharing updated and unprotected information from their members on available technology options.

### **Note for editors/reporters**

#### **SIGN NETWORK**

The Safe Injection Global Network (SIGN) was launched in 1999 as a voluntary coalition of stakeholders working for the safe and appropriate use of injections throughout the world. WHO hosts the SIGN Secretariat.

For more information on the Safe Injection Global Network, visit  
[http://www.who.int/injection\\_safety/sign/en](http://www.who.int/injection_safety/sign/en)

Fact sheet: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs231/en/index.html>  
[http://www.who.int/injection\\_safety/sign/en](http://www.who.int/injection_safety/sign/en)

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