



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Experts gather to focus on the role of vaccines in public health at a time of increasing anti-vaccine rhetoric and complacency

1 APRIL 2011, PRAGUE: International experts gather in Prague today for a three day meeting focused on the impact of vaccines on public health, at a time of increasing concern that public scepticism and complacency could undermine the positive impact of current and future vaccine campaigns.

The conference, organised by the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) in collaboration with some of the world's leading infectious disease societies, will focus on a range of vaccine-related topics, not least the issue of vocal and persistent anti-vaccine groups that are influencing parents and individuals choices with dangerously misleading information. There is also concern that because vaccines have all but eradicated a number of deadly childhood diseases, some parents have become complacent about getting their children vaccinated believing that such diseases are benign or easily treatable. A lack of access to health services for certain disadvantaged groups and population movement across the region also pose challenges to achieving immunization targets in Europe.

“Immunization is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions and is a proven tool for controlling and even eradicating diseases around the world, on the premise that prevention is better than cure,” said ESCMID President, Professor Giuseppe Cornaglia. “Yet, despite having effective and safe vaccines which provide protection against more than 20 serious diseases, some of which are not curable, we are seeing stagnating levels of immunization in Europe, amid exaggerated concerns about the risks of vaccines.”

Vaccination programmes save nearly 3 million lives worldwide each year and immunization is among the most cost-effective health investments. For example, the elimination of polio globally would mean annual healthcare savings of \$1.5 billion.

But static levels of immunization in Europe are a cause for concern. Whereas average immunization coverage rates are relatively high in the European region (over 90%), full protection can usually only be achieved by 95% coverage. Europe has missed the milestone of measles and rubella elimination by 2010, and in the past couple of years measles outbreaks have occurred in Ireland, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and Switzerland.

“In the face of scientifically unsound claims about both inefficacy and side-effects of vaccines and a complacency about the diseases that vaccines prevent, the public health community must step up its efforts to educate parents, at risk groups and frontline health workers of the critical importance of vaccination to help avoid resurgences in serious, preventable illnesses and deaths”, said Professor Cornaglia.

John McConnell, Editor of *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, which is supporting the conference said, “Prevention of disease is at the heart of good public health, and there is no more effective prophylactic intervention than vaccination. Politicians and sections of the medical community have sometimes confused the public with an ambivalent attitude to immunization. A responsible approach to improving human health depends on healthcare providers and policy makers giving their full support to safe and effective modern vaccines.”



Day three of the conference takes place on the 4th International Day for Fighting Infection (3rd April), which will focus on the history of vaccination. “Vaccines have always faced public scepticism from as far back as Jenner, who first published his results on smallpox prevention in the early 1800s. But the development and roll out of vaccines over the past 200 years have made rare diseases out of formerly common killers, ” said Professor Cornaglia. ”Is it acceptable that after two centuries - and so many successes - some vocal opinion groups retain the same obscurantist attitude that tried to stop vaccination in its pioneering years?”

The conference will share experience, insights and scientific evidence on a range of vaccine related issues including pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine, the HPV vaccine and women’s health, vaccines for infants and the elderly, the malaria vaccine pipeline and vaccination for HIV.

For more information contact Claire Hoffman

Email: claire.hoffman@bartley-robbs.co.uk (+44 20 8892 5215 or +44 7977 440 353)

The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of infection-related diseases. This is achieved by promoting and supporting research, education, training, and good medical practice.

www.escmid.org

The ESCMID Conference on the Impact of Vaccines on Public Health is being held in cooperation with the European Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases (ESPID), the Global Chinese Association of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (GCACMID), the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) and the International Society for Infectious Diseases (ISID).