MEDIA ADVISORY

World’s largest conference on infectious diseases, Berlin 27-30 April 2013

The world’s largest conference on infectious diseases is taking place in Berlin, 27-30 April 2013, gathering more than 10,000 experts from around the world.

The annual European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ECCMID) offers state-of-the art updates in infectious diseases and clinical microbiology. As well as information on cutting edge science and technology, a range of experts will be available from all fields of infectious diseases. Petra Gastmeier of Charité University Medicine Berlin (CUB) is the Congress President.

Below are some of the current issues making headlines in infectious diseases across Europe that experts at ECCMID will be available to speak about.

If you are interested in attending ECCMID, requesting interviews or further information and press materials please contact;

Claire Hoffman, claire.hoffman@bartley-robbs.co.uk +44 7977 440 353 or +44 208 892 5215
Robyn Bartley-Cooper, robyn.bartley@bartley-robbs.co.uk +44 7500 011001


HEADLINES IN INFECTIOUS DISEASES ACROSS EUROPE

Antibiotic resistance – Antibiotic resistance is developing at such a pace many fear we could soon face a future where many common infections would no longer have a cure and would kill “unabated”. Experts are calling it a “ticking time bomb” with the situation being compounded by the emergence of “nightmare bacteria”. With no new class of antibiotics since 1987 and few antibiotics in the pipeline, new pathogens are emerging every year, and existing bugs are developing resistant to current treatments. If no coordinated action is taken we could face a scenario where routine operations, cancer treatments and organ transplants would no longer be possible.

Measles and rubella epidemics - Measles has re-emerged in Europe recently with the number of cases increasing by a factor of four between 2010 and 2011. Measles has been virtually eliminated in North and South America, but Western Europe is lagging behind due to stagnating vaccine coverage. Between 2000-2010 an estimated 5 million individuals in EU countries aged 2-12 years had not had the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccination. 25 European countries saw an increase in cases of rubella in 2012, largely affecting teenagers. Whilst anti-vaccination activists continue to spread the message that childhood immunizations are unnecessary and harmful, the impact of unvaccinated or under-vaccinated pockets of populations is currently being seen across Europe.

Vaccines are one of the major achievements of public health care and the most effective and efficient strategy to prevent infectious diseases. Yet vaccination rates in industrialised countries have been declining for the past decade due to a distrust of vaccinations and concerns about vaccine safety, as well as the belief that new outbreaks of diseases which
have been nearly eliminated over the past decade are unlikely to occur. Vaccine-preventable diseases are costly both at an individual and societal level and the current measles outbreaks clearly demonstrate the consequences of under-vaccination. A 1996 outbreak of polio in Albania, Greece and former Yugoslavia showed how easily a disease can be reintroduced to countries once free of the disease if immunization coverage is allowed to drop. (Other vaccine topics include Europe’s HPV campaigns, travel immunization, vaccines and the elderly and the need for a TB vaccine).

**Coronavirus** - the scientific community is monitoring the emergence of a new coronavirus – a variant of the respiratory virus that causes the common cold but was also the cause of the SARS (sever acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak of 2003 which swept across the world killing more than 700 people. The new coronavirus, first detected in September 2012 in a patient in Saudi Arabia, was followed by cases in Qatar and the UK and by the end of March 2013 is estimated to have infected 17 patients, causing eleven deaths. There is also evidence of person to person transmission with implications for travel. As the 10th anniversary of the SARS outbreak was marked this year in March, the lessons learnt during that epidemic are serving well in monitoring and preparedness for future outbreaks.

**Seasonal Influenza and new strain of bird flu (H7N9)**

Each year the influenza virus infects between 5-15% of the global population, with 250-500,000 deaths every year. Related complications cause hundreds of thousands of hospitalisations across Europe every winter and experts stress it should be taken seriously. 2012/2013 saw seasonal influenza epidemic start earlier than in the previous season. Those who are recommended to have the influenza vaccine – such as the elderly, people with chronic diseases, pregnant women and healthcare workers - are urged to get vaccinated as immunisations remains the single more effective preventative measure for protection.

A new strain of influenza has emerged – H7N9 - centred in the Eastern areas of China with more than 60 human cases confirmed, and some 13 deaths. The H7N9 strain is normally found in birds and not previously known to infect humans until March this year. The source of infection is still unclear and further cases are expected. The worry is it appears to be well-adapted to infect humans but officials in China are currently describing the situation as stable. And as experts say with flu, expect the unexpected.

**Tuberculosis** - TB is still killing 44,000 every year in Europe, with cases of multi-drug resistant TB on the rise. TB is also a leading killer among people living with HIV/AIDS – people who are co-infected with TB and HIV are up to 34 times more likely to develop active TB disease than those without HIV. Drug-resistant TB – which is hugely expensive and more difficult to treat - affects an estimated 78,000. Some 15 of the 27 countries with the highest burden of drug-resistant TB are in the WHO European region (includes Russia). Whilst TB can affect everyone it is especially linked to the social determinants of health including migration, imprisonment and social marginalisation.

**HIV/AIDS** - There are few signs of a decline in HIV transmission across Europe with more than 121,000 new HIV cases reported in 2011. And Eastern Europe has fastest growing HIV epidemic in the world. Only one in four patients receives the necessary antiretroviral treatment in the Eastern part of the region – a rate that is among the lowest in the world. Of those newly infected with HIV, some 50% get tested late which impacts on the effectiveness of treatment and longer term outcomes.