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Temporary hospital for flu victims in Fort Riley, Kansas, in 1918.

Potential pandemic

The threat of a pandemic persists undiminished even though the issue has disappeared from the news headlines. Many countries are not (yet) adequately prepared, and Switzerland can only offer very limited (if any) assistance to Swiss expatriates in the event of a pandemic. Personal protection is therefore highly advisable.

The number of people who were infected with bird flu in 2006 increased significantly over the previous year. The World Health Organisation (WHO) warns that the risk of a major influenza pandemic has not diminished.

Many countries are preparing intensively for a pandemic. Most industrialised nations have now stockpiled enough Tamiflu® to treat 25% of the population and should therefore be able to treat all those in-

fectured in the first wave of a pandemic. These countries should then have sufficient specific pandemic vaccines to tackle a later, second wave of any pandemic. Some countries – Switzerland included – are also acquiring so-called “pre-pandemic vaccines”, although these afford only limited protection.

Developing and newly-industrialised nations are often not in a position to take expensive precautionary measures. Although the WHO now has a stockpile of 5,125,000 treatment courses of Tamiflu® (a donation from Roche), these will only suffice if a nascent epidemic can be contained relatively quickly, as was the case with the SARS outbreak of 2003, for example.

According to the WHO and national health authorities, Tamiflu® (as well as Relenza®, a drug that has to be inhaled) remains the medication of choice for any future viral pandemic. It has a shelf-life of at least five



Tackling bird flu at a poultry farm in Thailand in August 2006.

years from the production date and should be taken regularly (by doctor's prescription) and as quickly as possible in the case of infection during a pandemic, though no later than 36 to 48 hours after the onset of the initial symptoms.

If you live in a country that has not stockpiled enough Tamiflu® to treat 25% of the population, it is advisable to purchase this medicine yourself.

Tamiflu® is now approved and available in some 100 countries. If you live in a country in which this medication is not officially on sale, please take care to purchase it from a reputable source.

The DFA will be acquiring limited emergency reserves of Tamiflu® for countries in which Tamiflu® is not available and is looking into further measures. However, this emergency reserve will only be released once a pandemic breaks out and only to people who have already fallen ill and had no means of purchasing Tamiflu® themselves.

Personal precautions are a good idea even if your country of residence has stockpiled sufficient amounts of Tamiflu®. Healthcare systems the world over will be overstretched in

the event of a pandemic. Should a serious pandemic arise, even industrialised nations could experience temporary cuts in power and water supplies and food shortages.

The DFA has published recommendations for precautions you can take, and these can be consulted on your embassy's Web site. Please also find out about the recommendations of your local authorities and regularly consult the Web pages of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (www.bag.admin.ch) and the World Health Organisation (www.who.int). Useful information is also available at www.fluwiki.com, for example, (under “Pandemic Preparedness”). The Federal Office of Public Health has also set up a telephone hotline which can be called for further information during Swiss office hours:

+41 (0)31 322 21 00.

Countries in which Tamiflu® is available

All EU and OECD Member States, Albania, Argentina, Bahrain, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Chile, China, Columbia (only for companies and authorities), Congo, Croatia, the Dominican Republic,

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Slaughtered hens in England in April 2006

Ecuador (only directly from Roche), Egypt, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Macedonia, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Nicaragua, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uruguay, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Vietnam.

DFA, POLITICAL DIVISION VI

Better protection for animals

In January 2006, the initiative committee of the Swiss Animal Protection association (SAP) launched a federal popular initiative entitled "Against cruelty to animals and for better legal rights for animals"; the animal rights lawyers' initiative (see issue 2/06). The initiative calls for cantonal animal rights lawyers to ensure that animals get better legal protection.

The initiative proposes that two new paragraphs be added

to Article 80 of the Swiss Federal Constitution. The new paragraph 4 would oblige the state to offer animals legal protection as sentient living creatures. The new paragraph 5 would call for the use of animal rights lawyers in criminal proceedings against those who commit cruelty to animals.

The initiative committee maintains that most cases of animal cruelty are perpetrated by owners themselves. Criminal proceedings involving animal protection would lack an

POPULAR INITIATIVES

The following initiatives have been launched since the last issue:

- "Against fat-cat payouts"; until 1 May 2008
- "For fair taxes. Stop abuses of tax competition (the fiscal justice initiative)"; until 21 May 2008

Signature forms for current initiatives can be downloaded from the Federal Chancellery site: www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis_1_3_1_1.html.

VOTING

Federal referendum on 11 March 2007: Popular initiative of 9 December 2004 "For a uniform social health insurance fund"

Date of the next referendum in 2007: 17 June

aggrieved party, or rather this would be exactly the same person as the accused. Whereas the accused would enjoy all procedural rights in a penal trial, the interests of abused animals could not be safeguarded in such criminal proceedings. This could prevent important evidence being recorded, cause delays in the proceedings and even lead to cases being dropped altogether. This is where animal rights lawyers are to come in. They are to counteract the tendency to play down instances of cruelty, and at the same time remove the burden

on veterinary authorities to press charges for animal abuse. The animal rights lawyers are also to promote understanding of animal protection legislation among criminal investigators and courts and thus ensure more uniform and fair assessment and legal procedure.

The initiative can be signed until 31 July 2007.

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Consular service

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is running an entrance examination to recruit young people for the consular service. The closing date for applications is 28.2.2007!

Successful candidates will undertake consular and administrative duties at the chancelleries of our foreign representations, primarily in the fields of accounting, registration of Swiss citizens living abroad, passports, visa processing, civil status matters, certification of documents, citizenship issues, consular protection, voting and much more.

Applicants should be Swiss citizens, have a federal commercial diploma (profile E or M)

or an equivalent qualification from a cantonal commercial or business school, two years' professional experience in a relevant position, and a good overall character (an extract from the register of convictions must be submitted as part of the application), and be aged under 32 in the year of the entrance examination.

Further details can be found at the following address: www.eda.admin.ch/eda/g/home/dep/jobs/consu.html

Queries may be addressed to: concours@eda.admin.ch

DFA, Directorate of Corporate Management, Recruitment and Marketing, CH-3003 Berne www.eda.admin.ch