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Pandemic influenza (H1N1) 2009 Influenza vaccination for Swiss nationals abroad

Following the announcement by the Federal Office of Health on 18 September 2009 that the Swiss population would be vaccinated against pandemic influenza H1N1/2009, that this would be organised by the cantons and that the costs would be jointly borne by the Confederation, the cantons and the health insurance companies, numerous enquiries were received from Swiss nationals abroad asking their representations about the possibility of receiving free vaccinations.

If Swiss nationals abroad can be vaccinated in their country of residence against pandemic influenza H1N1/2009, they should do this there at their own expense (or according to the local provisions). Swiss nationals living abroad who cannot be vaccinated in their country of residence are entitled to travel to Switzerland at their own expense and receive a free vaccination at one of the army vaccination centres listed below:

Berne

Kaserne Bern, Krankenabteilung, 3000 Bern 22,
Tel. +41 31 324 44 47

Liestal

Kaserne Liestal, Krankenabteilung, Kasernenstrasse 13,
4410 Liestal, Tel. +41 61 926 75 55

Geneva

Caserne des Vernets, Infirmerie,
Quai des Vernets, 1211 Genève 26,
Tel. +41 79 781 55 25

Chur

Kaserne Chur, Krankenabteilung,
7000 Chur, Tel. +41 81 258 22 82

Zurich

Kaserne Kloten, Krankenabteilung,
8302 Kloten, Tel. +41 44 815 95 00

Monte Ceneri

Piazza d'armi, infermeria/CMR,
6802 Rivera/Monte Ceneri,
Tel. +41 91 935 80 50

The time and date of the vaccination should be agreed in advance by telephone with the vaccination centre concerned. At the time of the vaccination in the army vaccination centres, anyone wishing to be vaccinated must present their Swiss passport and their vaccination certificate and must provide plausible reasons as to why they cannot be vaccinated against H1N1/2009 in their country of residence.

People in risk groups will not have access to the army vaccination centres. These include pregnant women, women who have recently given birth, people with chronic illnesses and anyone living in the same household as those with chronic illnesses, as well as children aged under 18. These people must be vaccinated against pandemic influenza H1N1/2009 by a doctor of their choice. In such cases, the costs of the vaccine will be borne by the Confederation.

If these people do not have health insurance cover in Switzerland, the doctor in question may charge them for the treatment. The people concerned will then have to discuss with their foreign health insurer whether the costs of such treatment can be reimbursed.

The Swiss passport of the future

Today, around 70 countries only issue passports containing electronically recorded data - the electronic passport. Switzerland has been operating an electronic passport pilot project since 2006. This electronic passport will now be introduced definitively. The Federal Council and Parliament hope this will ensure the freedom of Swiss citizens to travel and improve the security of identity documents.

Today, some 70 countries, including all of Switzerland's neighbours, are taking advantage of the benefits of electronically readable data, and are now only issuing electronic passports. This figure is set to rise to more than 90 by the end of 2009. Switzerland has been issuing electronic passports, known as Passport 06, since September 2006 as part of a fixed-term pilot project. The definitive introduction of the electronic passport (Passport 10) has required an amendment to the law on identity documents. In line with the international directives in force, this amendment enables the photograph and, from the age of 12, the fingerprint of two fingers to be recorded on a microchip in Swiss passports in addition to the holder's usual personal data. The definitive introduction of

the electronic passport will ensure Swiss citizens' freedom to travel. It will enable them to continue to travel to the USA or pass through it in transit without having to purchase a visa, which costs more than Passport 10. The USA only grants visa exemptions for citizens of countries that issue electronic passports.



Securing achievements

Thanks to the definitive introduction of the electronic passport, Switzerland will be able to continue its collaboration with its partner states in the Schengen area. Switzerland will therefore secure its recent achievements, in particular close cooperation between judicial and police authorities with their dense network set up to combat criminality, the clarification of asylum regulations to counter multiple applications and, most significantly, easier movement of travellers across borders. Electronic data also enables better protection of the Swiss passport against misuse. Obtaining a passport fraudulently and using a stolen or lost passport will indeed become much more difficult because the photograph and fingerprints can be read electronically, enabling the identity of the person presenting the passport to be checked both at border controls and when applying for a new passport. If Switzerland had failed to take advantage of this opportunity, the Swiss passport may have become a more frequent target of misuse and forgery in the future.

Biometric data is nothing new

Switzerland is endeavouring to permanently bring its passport into line with the latest innovations in order to combat forgery and to ensure its citizens' freedom to travel. Since its introduction in 1915, the Swiss passport has been regularly updated to keep up with the latest developments in technology. Biometric data, such as the facial image and hair and eye colour, have always been used. They enable an identity document to be unequivocally issued to its legitimate holder.

The identity card will remain without a microchip

The revision of the law on identity documents creates the legal basis required to electronically record biometric data in Swiss identity documents (Art. 2, Para. 2bis). In Art. 2, Para. 2ter, the Federal Council defines the types of identity documents that are to be equipped with microchips. However, this provision, which will be implemented on 1 March 2010, only concerns the Swiss passport and Swiss travel documents for foreigners. The identity card will therefore continue to be issued in its current form, i.e. without a microchip, until further notice. It is as yet unclear whether an identity card with a microchip will be issued at some point in time and, should this be the case, whether an identity card without a microchip could be established in parallel to one with a chip. It will not be possible to submit a proposal aimed at upgrading the identity card to the Federal Council until all the relevant conditions and issues have been examined.

The electronic passport in the Schengen area

Maximum data protection

The data contained in the new electronic passport is protected through the application of international standards to ensure any manipulation or copying (cloning) is identified at control points. Provided all the standards are applied when the documents are produced and checked, there will be no security gaps. Switzerland is implementing all these standards correctly. In areas where it is able to, it is adopting data protection standards which are even more rigorous than the international standards. Moreover, there is a new procedure ensuring extremely tight security for fingerprints, as other countries require authorisation from Switzerland before they are able to read the data. The Federal Council only grants authorisation to countries where the level of data protection is equivalent to that in Switzerland. It may also grant authorisation to other organisations that check people's identities in the public interest (e.g. airline companies). The Federal Council withdraws data reading authorisation if Switzerland's data protection requirements are not met.

A simple procedure at a reasonable cost

The federal decree enables the introduction of an efficient new procedure for issuing identity documents which is particularly beneficial to families. In contrast to Passport 06, only one visit to the representation is required. This procedure enables the continuation of the combined offer, where a preferential rate is granted when an electronic passport and an identity card are

applied for at the same time. The Federal Council has decided on the following prices for electronic passports: CHF 140 for adult passports valid for 10 years (CHF 148 for the combined offer, i.e. the electronic passport and identity card) and CHF 60 for 5-year passports for children and young people (CHF 68 for the combined offer).

An information system to counter misuse

In order to issue and manage identity documents quickly and securely, it is vital to have access to certain information. It is necessary to be able to determine who has received what document and what data is contained in it. The information system for identity documents (ISA) has been used for this purpose since 2003. The personal data and photograph of identity document holders are recorded in ISA, which will also contain two fingerprints in the future. The EC regulation on identity documents does not require data to be recorded centrally. The requirements set out by the federal decree go further than those of the EC regulation in order to ensure greater security. While the recording of data in the passport is primarily intended for foreign authorities responsible for border control, the Swiss benefit from centralised recording in ISA as it protects their identity from misuse and provides a reliable and efficient procedure for issuing identity documents. Indeed, the data contained in ISA can be reused when issuing new identity documents in order to quickly and reliably verify that the person making the application is the legitimate holder of the identity document. This makes the issue of Swiss identity documents more secure. However, the use of ISA for the purposes of police investigations is prohibited in Switzerland and abroad. Foreign authorities have no access to ISA or the data recorded there.

Further information is available online at www.passeportsuisse.ch and www.fedpol.admin.ch as well as on the websites of the representations.

FDFA: New Head of Consular Protection

The FDFA's Political Affairs Division VI, part of the Directorate of Political Affairs headed by State Secretary Michael Ambühl, looks after the interests of Swiss nationals resident abroad. Headed by Ambassador Markus Börlin, the division covers the following organisations: the Service for the Swiss Abroad, the Information for Travellers and Crisis Management agency and the Consular Protection section. At the beginning

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of September 2009, Andreas Maager took over as head of this section, replacing Ernst Steinmann who has been posted to St. Petersburg as Swiss Consul General.

Andreas Maager was born in his hometown of St. Gallen in 1959 and spent his formative years there, graduating with a commercial business diploma from St. Gallen Verkehrsschule. In 1977, he joined the Swiss civil service as a technical customs officer before moving to the FDFA at the beginning of 1984 to embark on a consular career. An initial internship in Dijon/France was followed by postings to The Hague/The Netherlands, Riad/Saudi Arabia, Annecy/France and Houston/USA. In October 1997, he was posted as Third Secretary to the embassy in Dakar/Senegal, where for the first time he assumed the office of head of the chancellery. He subsequently performed the same function at the Swiss EU Mission in Brussels/Belgium from the summer of 2000 to spring 2004. From April 2004 to the summer of 2009, Andreas Maager was Counsellor at the embassy in Abu Dhabi/UAE before returning to Berne to head up the Consular Protection section. Andreas Maager is married with three grown-up children.

The Consular Protection section looks after the interests of Swiss nationals who are resident abroad and have suffered an accident or become the victim of theft or violent crime, for example. The section also extends consular protection to Swiss nationals incarcerated abroad and helps to settle the affairs of Swiss citizens who have died abroad. In certain cases, the Consular Protection section also deals with child kidnappings (if this involves states that are not signatories to the Hague Convention) and occasionally assists in residency inquiries. Every year, the team of six deal with roughly 800 cases, and the situations they handle are becoming increasingly complex.



Andreas Maager, new head of the Consular Protection section



Whom do I contact when I need a new Swiss passport? I am contemplating studying in Switzerland but I would like to check out the available options beforehand – where should I go for help? Which media report comprehensively on Swiss affairs and can be accessed from abroad?

The answers to these and many other questions about living abroad are contained in the new “Advice for Swiss Abroad”. Not only will it provide you with the information you are seeking, it also forms a bridge to your original home country, Switzerland. Each chapter also provides additional links for the relevant topic.

“Advice for Swiss Abroad” was last printed in 2002. Due to the sustained high level of demand, coupled with numerous changes since 2002, we have decided to publish a new edition.

“Advice for Swiss Abroad” is available in German, French and Italian and can be ordered from the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics (FBL), Sale of Publications, CH-3003 Berne, www.bundespublikationen.ch

NEW POPULAR INITIATIVES AND REFERENDA

By the time of going to press, the following new popular initiatives had been launched since the last edition:

- “Pädophile sollen nicht mehr mit Kindern arbeiten dürfen” (Paedophiles should no longer be allowed to work with children), initiative committee: Marche Blanche; deadline for collection of signatures: 20.04.2011
- “1:12 – für gerechte Löhne” (1:12 – for fair pay), initiative committee: JUSO JungsozialistInnen Schweiz; deadline for collection of signatures: 06.04.2011
- “Ja zur Hausarztmedizin” (Yes to family medicine), initiative committee: Eidgenössische Volksinitiative ‘Ja zur Hausarztmedizin’; deadline for collection of signatures: 29.03.2011

At www.bk.admin.ch/aktuell/abstimmung you will find a list of pending referenda and popular initiatives and the corresponding signature forms if available. Please complete, sign and send the forms directly to the relevant initiative committee.

The new “Advice for Swiss Abroad” is out!

The number of Swiss who take the plunge and live abroad – whether for a short time or with the firm intention of leaving Switzerland for good – is growing year by year. For those prepared to take this step, there are a great many obstacles and questions to be resolved. How do I exercise my political rights from abroad, and can I continue to vote in Switzerland?

RESPONSIBLE FOR THE OFFICIAL FDFA INFORMATION PAGES:
JEAN-FRANÇOIS LICHTENSTERN, SERVICE FOR THE SWISS ABROAD/FDFA,
BUNDESGASSE 32, CH-3003 BERNE
TEL. +41 31 324 23 98, FAX +41 31 322 78 66
WWW.EDA.ADMIN.CH/ASD, PA6-AUSLANDCH@EDA.ADMIN.CH