STATEMENT

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Event tourism & tick-borne encephalitis

TBE (Tick-Borne Encephalitis) is a viral disease transmitted by ticks that attacks the central nervous system and can cause both mild and severe illnesses, with permanent sequelae such as concentration problems, paralysis and depression. Approximately every 100th case results in the death of the affected person.

Over the past three decades, TBE has become a growing public health problem in Europe and other parts of the world, with an increasing number of more than 13,000 cases of TBE requiring hospitalization every year. But not only the number of cases is increasing every year, so are travel streams from non-vaccinated persons from non-endemic to high-risk areas which are spread all over Eastern, Central but also some parts of Northern, Southern and Western Europe. TBE is endemic in regions of 27 European countries and the risk areas are increasing every year.

During the last years, Europe has been extremely popular for tourists. With estimated 458 mio travelers in 2006, today Europe generates more than half of total international tourist arrivals and the market is expected to grow further during the next years. During the past 3 years - with regard to the disease TBE - the number of travels from European member states to TBE endemic areas or countries increased from 60 millions to 70 million travels per year. The EU defines a “travel” as one or more nights abroad.

Since event tourism plays an important role in nowaday´s tourism industry, an increasing number of people is traveling to big international sporting, cultural, educational or political and religious events. Even if a stay associated with visiting such an event might be very short, the risk of TBE infection in an endemic area remains high. Almost half a million of people will be traveling to one of this year’s major sports events, the European Soccer Championship. The host countries Austria and Switzerland are endemic for TBE but unfortunately in most European countries

there is still a big lack of awareness in the public about the potential risk when traveling to endemic areas.

The WHO, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other official bodies, such
as the International Scientific Working Group on Tick-Borne Encephalitis (ISW-TBE), recommend that everybody traveling to endemic areas undergo vaccination – the best way of protecting oneself. Nevertheless as an example on the CDC homepage there is no recommendation to vaccinate against TBE when going to high risk areas.
To support the spreading of the information about the disease and about how to best protect against it, the ISW-TBE has created a range of information material such as TBE info flyers, posters, endemic pocket maps, immunization cards and a CD Rom containing relevant information for download. In addition, the ISW-TBE started a comprehensive multi-stage mailing initiative to figure out to which extent the topic "event tourism & TBE" might be interesting for affected lay public organizations (youth groups, sport & leisure clubs, embassies) as well as for medical travel experts.

The following statements are a brief summary of the results:

- Among the lay public, 50% of people associate TBE with traveling, with Austrian, German and Dutch people having the highest awareness.
- 42% of the travel experts think that people from their country are aware of the risk of TBE when traveling to an endemic country within Europe, similar to one third in the lay public.
- The question if institutions are providing a recommendation or general information on TBE vaccination for the lay public (e.g. on the homepage) was answered with yes by 31% of lay public and 40%% of travel experts.