

**Press Workshop**  
**“Europe ‘s Fight against Tick-Borne Encephalitis”**

**„THE AUSTRIAN SUCCESS STORY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TBE/FSME“**

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Tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) virus is a member of the so-called flaviviruses which comprise about 70 different virus types most of which are transmitted to their vertebrate hosts by the bites of infected mosquitoes or ticks. In addition to TBE virus the most important human-pathogenic flaviviruses are yellow fever virus, Japanese encephalitis virus, West Nile virus, and the dengue viruses. Research on TBE virus - which includes studies on the disease in humans, laboratory diagnosis, epidemiology, and prevention by vaccination - has a long-standing tradition in Austria. It has made this country a model for the successful fight against an infectious disease which has a high impact as a public health problem, not only in Austria but also in many other European countries as well as central and eastern Asia. By the development and widespread use of a highly effective vaccine the incidence of TBE could be dramatically reduced in Austria. Through concerted actions of governmental and medical institutions the vaccination coverage has reached 88 % and concomitantly the number of annual human cases went down to about 10% of that observed in the pre-vaccination era. Since humans do not play any role for the maintenance of the virus in nature (where it circulates primarily between small rodents and ticks) vaccination of humans has no effect whatsoever on the distribution of the virus in endemic areas. It is thus not possible to eradicate the virus in nature, but the Austrian experience shows that vaccination is an excellent means to provide protection for people at risk on an individual basis.