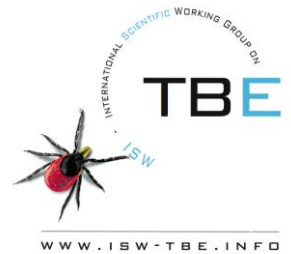


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Presentation of ISW-TBE and résumé of the ISW-TBE Activity Report 2006

TBE – a travel and tourism disease – but we can protect ourselves against it!

International TBE (tick borne encephalitis) experts meet in Vienna at the occasion of the 9th annual meeting of the International Scientific Working Group on TBE (ISW-TBE) to declare the fight against TBE on a European basis. Still an increasing number of more than 10.000 new TBE patients every year is registered after the bite of an infected tick. But not only are the numbers of cases increasing every year (like Germany, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Slovenia and Poland), so are the numbers of European travelers across Europe through the TBE endemic areas which are spread all over Eastern, Central and Western Europe already. Every year, over 60 million times, people from EU member states travel into TBE endemic countries. Since the latest extension of the EU borders, the number of tourists from Western Europe and Germany traveling into these countries has substantially risen. With 365 million travelers in 2004, today Europe generates more than half of total international tourist arrivals, with as major source markets Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Spain and the Nordic countries.

Based on estimated risk of TBE illness of 1/10.000 for a 4-week's stay in the TBE endemic province of Styria in Austria, the predicted number of travel-associated TBE cases was 6 per year over that county and 60 per year over the whole country of Austria.

Vaccination expert Professor Kunze pleads the case: "Given the continual growth in the numbers of UK tourists, for example, in countries where TBE is endemic, it is only a question of time before we also find an increase in the number of cases in this group. Travellers from countries such as the UK, Benelux, France and Canada need to be made aware that, once the disease has broken out, there is no effective treatment for sequelae. Immunisation with a TBE vaccine, in the context of preventive travel medicine, is the only method that offers lasting protection over a longer period."

And every year new risk areas are detected. It can be assumed from this that TBE is still far too little known, too rarely diagnosed, and also not prevented to the degree which it would be

possible to achieve. Therefore an efficient way of awareness raising to the population living in or traveling to endemic areas is key to banning TBE.

Unfortunately there is no causal treatment available for TBE affected patients; the only efficient prophylaxis is vaccination. The Austrian vaccination experience over the last more than 30 years has shown the success in reducing the high number of TBE cases from >700/year to less than 100 today. With regards to preventive programmes, it should be pointed out that inoculations basically exert their best effect if administered as early as possible (i.e. during childhood and adolescence). The success achieved in Austria with the containment of FSME is attributable not least to organized programmes (such as in schools). In most of the other European countries the vaccination rates are still only around 10 percent (in comparison with 87 percent in Austria).

Therefore the ultimate goal of the European TBE experts is to increase public awareness about TBE and to increase the number of people vaccinated in order to prevent as many new cases as possible. For those 100.000s of people affected and suffering from the disease already, a new international patient platform (www.tick-victims.info) provides additional support and information and is supposed to become the first pan-European TBE network for those affected – following the successful example of the patient advocacy in Austria over the last more than 20 years. The new patient platform was successfully launched in 2006 and will be available from the beginning – for intensive use for patients across Europe – in all European languages.

By way of a clarion call to public institutions and those with political responsibility in the individual countries, in 2006 the international group of TBE experts also presented a Europe-wide list of demands along with a call to heighten awareness of TBE as a major challenge facing health policy in the 21st century. A common European definition of the terms “endemic TBE area” and “TBE case” has already been placed before the ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). Increased work is being devoted to Europe-wide TBE vaccination recommendations and advice to travellers regarding TBE. The ISW is planning its own travellers’ website for 2007 as part of the intensification of the information campaign (www.TBE-prevention.info) as well as mailings and information folders.