



By Martin Banks - 23rd February 2012

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**A top EU official says that "preparedness" is the "key" to ensuring that Europe is ready to tackle future health emergencies.**

Speaking in Brussels, Martin Seychell, of the commission, said, "The EU is committed to improve international collaboration to tackle serious cross-border health threats."

Seychell, the commission's deputy director general of the directorate general for health and consumers, was a keynote speaker at a conference on the readiness of both Europe and Asia for future health pandemics.

He said, "Preparedness by critical sectors of society is the key to minimise the negative effects of a future major health emergency."

Recent years has seen the emergence of health pandemics, including Sars, CJD, avian flu and swine flu. The last major outbreak was the H1N1 virus in 2010.

Globally, more than 15,000 people died as a result of the H1N1 virus although the World Health Organisation (WHO) was widely criticised later for allegedly overstating the size and scale of the outbreak. The WHO had originally predicted between two to four million deaths from the outbreak.

Seychell was speaking at a conference organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation, a Singapore-based organisation.

Another speaker at the event was Hiromi Kakuta, a deputy director in Japan's foreign affairs ministry. She said that pandemic influenza is a "global issue" that has "impacts across nations and beyond borders".

"The response to emerging infectious diseases such as pandemic influenza requires strengthened efforts."

She said that, currently, some 500,000 stockpiles of anti-viral drugs were stored in Singapore but cautioned that "boxes of drugs alone" cannot guarantee a successful response to a global health emergency.

"Rapid containment requires prompt risk assessment, well organised logistics and proper risk communication," she told the gathering. "It is indispensable that all the players working in the field of global health, from government to the private sector, converge their efforts and financial resources."

Jurgen Graf, director of medical services for Lufthansa, the German airline, outlined his company's efforts to strengthen preparedness for a health scare such as Sars in air transport. He said, "Imagining possible futures is important to facilitate effective pandemic preparedness programmes in the air transport sector."

Another speaker, Sol Iglesias, of the Foundation, commented, "Public private partnership is a key to effective planning to prepare for future pandemics, like avian flu."