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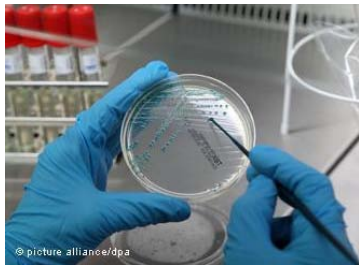
GERMANY WORLD BUSINESS SCI-TECH GLOBALIZATION ENVIRONMENT CULTURE SPORTS

TOP STORIES / SCI-TECH

HEALTH

EU to boost E. coli, pathogen research funding

The European Union has agreed to spend 2.1 million euros on new E. coli research over five years. The new project will be part of a broader 12 million euro research consortium across many European countries.



The E.coli outbreak in Germany killed 52 people

The European Commission has allocated 12 million euros (\$17 million) worth of funds toward future pathogenic and public health threats, with particular attention to the recent E. coli scare that hit Germany earlier this year.

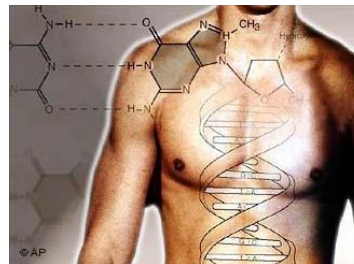
The epidemic, which peaked in late May, was mostly contained to northern Germany, although cases of infection were reported in other parts of Europe as well. In total, over 4,000 people became sick due to the virulent bacteria strain, and 52 people died. All but two of the deaths were recorded in Germany.

In a Tuesday announcement, the Commission unveiled a new cross-border research consortium called "Anticipating the Global Onset of Novel Epidemics," or Antigone, named after the character in ancient Greek mythology. The new scientific group will connect research from biological and public health experts in several European universities and research institutions.

In a statement, the European Commission said 2.1 million euros of the new funding would be specifically devoted to looking at the new E. coli strain that affected Germany. The rest of the money would fund other research into preventing and dealing with epidemics and pathogens.

The new Antigone program is designed to examine pathogenic threats that could emerge from the animal kingdom before they cross the "species barrier" and become a threat to humans.

"We're trying to understand the underlying factors and thereby, if possible, either detect such outbreaks at a very early stage before they cause problems in humans or to identify the risks for such emergent events and stopping them from causing an epidemic," Thijs Kuiken, a professor of comparative pathology at Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam and head of the Antigone project, told Deutsche Welle.



The new research consortium will spend 12 million euros over five years

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GERMANY



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» Government surveillance of Left party has murky legal basis

ENVIRONMENT

EU aviation carbon charge hit by China ban



China announced on Monday it would stop Chinese airlines from complying with an EU scheme to impose charges on carbon emissions. But Beijing says it's willing to negotiate a solution.

Big challenges in dairy industry's quest to curb

The Commission also authorized a "flexibility clause," that will allow for a quick response to funding research into unexpected human epidemic threats.

Understanding new threats

Many European scientists were encouraged by this new round of research funding.

"I am particularly pleased to see that although the project focuses on the outbreak strain of E. coli as an exemplar, the researchers are looking beyond this," said David Studholme, a senior lecturer in computational genomics at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom, in an e-mail sent to Deutsche Welle.



David Studholme said he was encouraged by the Antigone project

"It is inevitable that new infectious diseases will continue to emerge and threaten our health - or, just as importantly, the health of our livestock and crops - so we need to understand the general principles of how new diseases arise in the first place, how they spread, and how they change or evolve during an epidemic," he added.

Mark Pallen, a professor of microbial genomics at the University of Birmingham in the UK called Antigone "generally a good idea," but cautioned that there appears to be too much focus on

long-term academic science, when better rapid-response public tactics would be a better response.

He called on European public health organizations to improve their genetic sequencing technology - the preliminary sequencing of the German E. coli strain was in fact done by Chinese scientists at the Beijing Genomics Institute.

"Public health organizations across Europe are seem to be stuck in the late 20th century, at best, in terms of their technical repertoires and all need to fast forward to the second decade of the 21st century," Pallen said.

Skepticism remains

However, other scientists dismissed Antigone as mere window-dressing.

"Antigone is a 'quick fix' - no further calls for proposals have to be made, and the EU can be seen to be responding to the E. coli outbreak," Jonathan Fletcher, a senior lecturer in microbiology at the UK's University of Bradford, wrote in an e-mail to Deutsche Welle.

"The German outbreak hardly fell in to the category of a major cross-border epidemic - almost all people affected lived in a relatively small area, those cases identified in other counties had all usually been in the outbreak region previously," he added. "My own feeling is that the Antigone project, if it had been running, would have had little effect on the course of the E. coli outbreak."

Author: Cyrus Farivar

Editor: Sean Sinico



European DNA sequencing capabilities need improvement, some scientists said

climate change

Namibia's Bushmen profit from nature

STRATEGY

Kenya's dairy industry switches from cows to camels



With more frequent droughts, cows do not reliably produce milk anymore. Camels are more robust.

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