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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FINALLY RELEASES PHARMA LAW REFORMS

The European Commission has unveiled a new pharmaceutical package aimed at improving patient access to new drugs. The package includes a set of regulatory incentives for the industry to ensure equitable access to safe and effective medicines, regardless of which EU member state patients live in.

The Commission figures reveal that there is a 90% variance between Northern and Western European countries and Southern and Eastern European countries in terms of available medicines. The package proposes a new incentive system that rewards companies that go the extra mile, shifting to a targeted approach based on certain criteria rather than the current one-size-fits-all approach. The Commission is also offering regulatory protection of up to 12 years for innovative medicines, compared to the current system's 11 years of protection, along with an extra year of exclusive rights on the drug for the marketing authorisation holder.

However, the partial shortening of the regulatory data protection period has met with fierce criticism from the pharmaceutical industry. The incentives will apply equally to all products regardless of where they are developed. According to the Commission's impact assessment, this incentive system would help another 67 million European citizens have access to medicines. As the EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides has concluded while presenting the package, the EU *"will continue to have one of the most competitive and industry-friendly incentive systems in the world because companies can still reach the 11 years of protection they have today. But they can go as high as 12 if they fulfil all conditions"*.

The proposal will now be discussed by the European Parliament and the EU Council before its approval.

Source: https://health.ec.europa.eu/medicinal-products/pharmaceutical-strategy-europe/reform-eu-pharmaceutical-legislation_en

GLOBAL FUND CHIEF WARNS OF NEXT PANDEMIC FUELED BY CLIMATE CHANGE AND EXISTING DISEASES

Peter Sands, the head of the Global Fund, warns that the next pandemic will likely be a disease we already know, fueled by climate change, instead of a new disease, which is why it is important to prepare for the ones already in front of us.

Climate change and human encroachment on natural habitats increase the likelihood of the emergence of a new infectious disease, but its impact on existing diseases is already happening. The effect of climate change on existing deadly diseases could lead to a resurgence of malaria in the West, where extreme weather events are on the rise. In Pakistan, for instance, flooding likely made worse by climate change killed more than 1,700 people in 2022. In the aftermath, cases of malaria surged, and more people died from the disease than directly from flooding. Standing water and waterlogged areas make for prime breeding grounds for the mosquitoes that carry the deadly infection.

While Europe might also be at risk, Sands believes that the region has relatively advanced health systems and would feel the impact less than other places where health systems are already under strain and ill-resourced. The EU is working to set things right through its new Global Health Strategy, which prioritizes strengthening health systems. Sands emphasizes that the impact of climate change on health and people's lives is not hypothetical but real. Though most official development assistance is attributed to countries dealing with an influx of refugees and aid to Ukraine, the Global Fund provides 63% of all international financing for malaria programs.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/next-pandemic-disease-climate-change-peter-sands-global-fund/>

WHO WARNS OF HUGE BIOLOGICAL RISK AS SUDAN FIGHTERS OCCUPY NATIONAL PUBLIC LABORATORY WITH DISEASE SAMPLES

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of a “huge biological risk” after fighters in Sudan seized the country’s national public laboratory holding samples of diseases including polio and measles.

Nima Saeed Abid, the WHO’s representative in Sudan, stated that the situation is “extremely, extremely dangerous” since the lab is completely under the control of one of the fighting parties as a military base. Fighters kicked out all the technicians from the lab, making it impossible to manage the samples properly. It is not clear which side’s fighters have seized the laboratory, and the WHO representative did not specify.

The power struggle between Sudan’s military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as “Hemeti,” has plunged Sudan into fierce fighting. However, the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that both groups had agreed to a 72-hour nationwide cease-fire, beginning at midnight, while governments worldwide are ramping up their efforts to evacuate their nationals from the country. The French government has coordinated much of the EU countries' efforts to evacuate their nationals and diplomats. Abid said that he had received the information about the laboratory takeover from the head of the national laboratory in Khartoum on Monday, a day before the cease-fire came into effect.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/who-sudan-fighters-occupation-of-health-lab-poses-huge-biological-risk-polio-measles-geneva/>

Thank you for your attention!

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