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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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FRANCE EMBEDS ABORTION RIGHTS IN CONSTITUTION, SETTING GLOBAL PRECEDENT

In a groundbreaking development, France's Parliament has passed a constitutional reform enshrining the right to abortion, marking a historic victory for women's rights advocates. The reform, approved with an overwhelming majority, guarantees women the freedom to voluntarily terminate pregnancies, making France the first country in the world to embed such a provision in its constitution.

The amendment, passed in a joint session of Parliament, modifies Article 34 of the French Constitution to explicitly recognize and protect the right of women to choose abortion. The decision comes in response to recent challenges to abortion rights globally, particularly in the United States, where restrictions have been tightened. President Emmanuel Macron, who championed the reform, hailed it as a moment of "French pride" and a universal message of empowerment for women. The move is set to be celebrated on International Women's Rights Day, underlining its significance in the fight for gender equality.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal emphasized France's commitment to leading the charge for women's rights globally, invoking the legacy of key feminist figures like Simone Veil, whose advocacy paved the way for the decriminalization of abortion in France in 1975. Despite overwhelming public support for abortion rights in France, the reform faced some opposition. However, its passage reflects a decisive step forward in safeguarding women's reproductive autonomy and ensuring that access to abortion remains a fundamental right for generations to come.

Source: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/03/04/france-enshrines-freedom-to-abortion-in-constitution-in-world-first_6584252_5.html

RISING RATES OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS ACROSS EUROPE

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has released a series of reports exposing a concerning uptick in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) across Europe. The latest data on chlamydia, gonorrhoea, and lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV) from 27 European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries underscore a persistent and dynamic challenge in the realm of public health..

Despite a temporary decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic, STI rates have continued to climb, mirroring the worrying trend seen in syphilis cases. The surge in gonorrhoea cases, particularly among men who have sex with men (MSM), has raised significant concerns about antimicrobial resistance (AMR), highlighting the urgent need for vigilant monitoring and response strategies. Similarly, chlamydia infections have shown an alarming rise, with young adult heterosexual women bearing the highest burden. Gender disparities in testing suggest a potential underdiagnosis among men. Additionally, the escalating cases of lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV), especially among HIV-negative MSM, present unique challenges due to its long-term complications.

The reports emphasize the critical importance of strengthening prevention efforts, including enhanced testing, targeted interventions, and monitoring of AMR. Collaborative action among public health authorities, healthcare providers, and communities is essential to combat the spread of STIs and mitigate their profound impact on individuals and public health systems.

Source: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/rising-rates-sexually-transmitted-infections-across-europe>

INCB RAISES ALARM AS OPIOIDS GAIN TRACTION ACROSS THE CONTINENT

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has issued a stark warning about the escalating availability of opioids in Europe, signaling a potential crisis that demands urgent attention. Pierre Lapaque, a member of the INCB's Executive Committee, highlighted the proliferation of synthetic chemical opioids as a significant public health concern, echoing fears of a looming crisis on the continent.

Opioids, including heroin, morphine, codeine, and fentanyl, pose severe risks, with potential fatal consequences due to respiratory depression and overdose. While heroin remains the most prevalent opioid in Europe, the rise of synthetic opioids, particularly fentanyl, mirrors the devastating health crisis witnessed in the United States since the 1990s. Despite Europe's comparatively stricter drug prescriptions and well-developed addiction care programs, the threat of opioids looms large. While synthetic opioids have had a lesser impact in Europe compared to North America, heroin use is on the rise, with seizures doubling in 2021.

The infiltration of organized criminal groups utilizing internet-based technologies for drug trafficking poses additional challenges, making opioids more accessible than ever. With over one million high-risk opioid users in the EU, the question remains: Is Europe adequately prepared to confront a potential opioid crisis in terms of public health readiness? Urgent action and strengthened preparedness efforts are essential to mitigate the risks posed by the rising tide of opioids across the continent.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/opioids-on-the-rise-under-close-surveillance-in-europe/>

Thank you for your attention!

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