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**Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health to  
the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary  
Watercourses and International Lakes**

**Working Group on Water and Health**

Fifth meeting

Geneva, 11-12 October 2012

**Item 4 of the provisional agenda**

Information paper 4

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL MEETING ON ELIMINATION OF SOIL  
TRANSMITTED HELMINTHIASIS IN CHILDREN IN THE EUROPEAN REGION**

12-13 September 2012, Bonn, Germany

**1. Background**

Worldwide WHO estimates that there are more than one billion cases of parasitic intestinal worm infections. An additional 44 million infected pregnant women suffer significant morbidity and contributory mortality due to hookworm-associated anemia. In the European region more than four million children are in need of anthelmintic treatment, but detailed maps indicating the areas where prevalence warrants intervention are not available.

Soil-transmitted helminthes (STH) adversely affect nutritional status and cognitive processes during childhood. The infection is relatively simple to control by regular de-worming and improvement of water, sanitation and hygiene standards.

Although the Member States benefit from the support of the pharmaceutical industry in the form of free anthelmintic medication, additional effort is needed in the areas of hygiene, adequate sanitation and safe water supply to break the infectious cycle of STH. Such action is in line with the priority goals announced in the 4th and 5th Ministerial Conferences on Environment and Health, and with the stated aims of the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (“the Protocol”).

The Bureau of the Protocol at its eighth session (February 2012) requested the European Centre for Environment and Health, Bonn, to develop a Strategic Action Plan for Control and Prevention of Soil-transmitted Helminths in pre- and school-aged children in the European region. The Government of Germany provided support to the European Centre for Environment and Health for a project entitled *reducing infections by intestinal parasitic worms in European children*. The objectives of the proposal are to: i) assess current national programmes for the reduction of intestinal parasitic worms in (pre-)school aged children; ii) develop the basis for the control of infections by means of preventive chemotherapy and; iii) develop awareness raising and educative programmes on water, sanitation and hygiene.

## 2. Summary of the technical meeting

The project preparatory meeting was organized on 12-13 September 2012 in Bonn, Germany with the following main objectives:

- To exchange information on current burden of helminthic diseases in the member states of the European region, and in particular in countries Party to the Protocol;
- To agree on possible contribution by participants and plans for STH assessment in the selected countries.
- To discuss elements of a Strategic Action Plan which would be further developed by coordinated efforts of the national authorities, departments of neglected tropic diseases at WHO headquarters and Regional Office for Europe (EURO).

The technical experts from the WHO Collaborating Centre for the monitoring of anthelmintic drug efficacy for soil-transmitted helminthes at the Ghent University, Belgium, Women for Europe for Common Future (WECF), Task force on Water related disease surveillance of the Protocol on Water and Health and staff from WHO Headquarter, WHO EURO and ECEH Bonn attended the meeting.

### *Outcomes of the meeting:*

- Agreed on the objectives and scope of the country assessment in Moldova, Romania and Turkey (Annex 1) and a checklist for data inventory;
- Prepared elements of a draft framework of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for elimination of soil-transmitted helminthes (STH) in European children (Annex 2). The draft SAP framework will be presented to the Working Group on Water and Health (9–12 October 2012) and further updated. Furthermore, the draft SAP will be presented at the Meeting of the interested countries for feedback by the country representatives.
- Set a preliminary date (the week 50 or 51 -December 2012) of the Meeting for interested countries on control and prevention of STH.
- Identified the following immediate follow up actions to prepare for the meeting of the interested countries on STH control and prevention to be held in Bonn, Germany in December.
  - Telephone conference between WHO HQ/EURO, ECEH, CO – 16 September 2012;
  - Identify local STH experts by WHO HQ/EURO, CO by end September;
  - Finalize a checklist and send to national /local experts by 5 October with input by WHO CC, WECF and WHO;
  - Return filled checklists by national, local experts to WHO by end October;
  - Finalize objective and scope of the country assessment (WHO HQ/EURO, ECEH, CO, WECF, WHO CC) by 15 October; -
  - Conduct mission to Moldova on STH and WASH by November and set dates of mission to other two countries;
  - Prepare a summary paper of the project preparatory meeting to be submitted to the Meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health of the Protocol on Water and Health by 1 October 2012 (ECEH Bonn);
  - Prepare the draft SAP to the meeting of the interested countries by 30 November 2012(technical meeting participants and ECEH Bonn);
  - Formulate purpose and scope for the meeting of the interested countries and take necessary administrative action.

## Objectives and scope of the country assessment on STH

### Aim of the country assessment

The country assessment aims at collecting all the available epidemiological information on STH; and providing recommendations for strengthening STH control and prevention in the country. It is estimated that one week would be sufficient to fulfill the country mission.

### Specific objectives:

- To assess the awareness and action by health sector on STH control and prevention;
- To collect epidemiological information of STH in the country and identify areas where the periodical administration of anthelmintic is needed;
- To assess the current capacity of the country to control and prevent STH, identify partners/laboratories and provide recommendations for intensified action on STH control and prevention.

### Activities to be conducted

Prior to the country visit the consultant should search information on the STH epidemiology regarding the country available on internet (pub Med, Google scholar e.g.).

During the country visit the consultant should meet potential informant groups in Ministry of Health (report of high number of diagnosis from specific areas of the country, or population groups, survey etc), academia (publication in local languages, thesis, and unpublished surveys) and medical/parasitological societies.

The consultant should also discuss with focal point in the MoH the interest in controlling STH in the country and the local capacity to organize surveys and large scale de-worming programme and the willingness from the Ministry of Education to provide support.

At the end of the visit, the consultant should prepare a draft report compiling:

- i) The epidemiological information on STH prevalence, if possible provide a map indicating the areas in the country where periodical de-worming is warranted and areas where detailed survey should be organized;
- ii) Feedback from discussions with informant groups and focal point in the MoH about the interest, commitment and capacities to undertake de-worming programme, as well as the opportunities and possible challenges for possible intersectoral collaboration (e.g. collaboration with the Ministry of Education) An identification of areas for improvement and recommendations for national action against STH in children in the country. Possibilities for pilot testing the planned de-worming programmes should also be part of the report.

A final report will be then finalized in collaboration with WHO/NTD, WHO/EURO and ECEH and will include clear recommendations for STH control for the country.

**Draft framework of the Strategic Action Plan  
for elimination of soil-transmitted helminthes (STH) in European children**

## 1. Background

## 2. Problem statement

3. **Vision statement**

- All children in the European region are free from the soil-transmitted helminthes<sup>1</sup>

4. **Objectives and tasks**

4.1. To assess the epidemiology and burden of soil-transmitted helminthes (STH) infections in children and identify high risk areas and population

- Conduct an inventory of available information through contacting the national focal persons, experts and institutions
- Generate new data where necessary (prevalence- intensity surveys, WASH surveys, identification of potential transmission routes, behavioral survey)
- Provide support to laboratories in the data collection

4.2. Identification and evaluation of existing infrastructure to implement the programme

- Review existing national programmes and activities on STH control and prevention
- Evaluate availability and/or local production of anthelmintics
- Identify existing drug distribution network
- Assess capacity of laboratories to collect STH data
- Assess local capacity to collect and evaluate WASH data
- Identify existing training programmes for teachers and health and other personnel
- Evaluate existing water and sanitation infrastructure and hygiene education programmes

4.3. To develop country specific STH programmes including the following components:

(i) Administration of anthelmintic drugs,

(ii) Improving water and sanitation and

(iii) Hygiene promotion based on the information collected

Proposed tasks:

- Set national/local team (health, education, WASH) to develop and implement the country programmes
- Provide technical support, advice and guidance by the international experts and organize international meetings
- Establish pilots projects for STH control

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<sup>1</sup> Common definition of STH is *Ascaris*, *Trichuris*, hookworms (and strongyloides). There are other gastro-intestinal helminthes (*enterobius*, *hymenolepis*, etc) which are not included under the category of 'STH'; and both diagnosis and treatment are different. Therefore, SAP will target the mentioned STH.

- Evaluate the pilot projects
- Scale up and rolling out at national level

4.4. To monitor and evaluate progress towards elimination of STH in children and coordinate exchange of experience among the countries

5. Expected outcomes:

6. Funding: