

Advisory report of the Superior Health Council on the measures required in order to prevent WNV (West Nile Virus)- transmission by transfusion or transplantation and to enable its early detection.

S.H.C. : 7793/2

During the meeting of November 20th, 2003, the minutes of which –as far as this point is concerned - were approved during the session, the Superior Health Council (section 2.1) issued the following advisory report on the measures required to prevent WNV (West Nile Virus)-transmission by transfusion or transplantation and to enable its early detection.

Last year, certain parts of the world met with WNV-episodes. As a result, the disease cannot reasonably be qualified as endemic. Except for Romania, no epidemic was registered in Europe, contrary to what was the case in the United States, which saw an increase in the phenomenon. At the European level, the present situation could be summarised as follows: three countries prohibit the taking of blood samples for a period of 28 days following a stay in the United States or following the disappearance of the symptoms; three countries are considering the matter and three countries have not taken any particular precautions.

Cases of transmission to humans have clearly been identified in the United States (confirmation obtained from donors subjected to the PCR-method). Also, the technical appendixes of a recent European document advise against taking blood samples for a period of 28 days after leaving an area of the United States in which cases of transmission have been identified.

Bearing these observations in mind, it appears necessary for Belgium to take a decision in this matter (as far as transfusions are concerned) and for the SHC to provide preventive recommendations to our Minister.

As far as the risk of transfusion-transmitted WNV is concerned, the section “Blood and bone marrow” of the SHC advises that no blood samples be taken from any person who has been back for less than 28 days from an area where cases of WNV-transmission to humans have been shown to have occurred. These areas are listed in surveys issued by the official international agencies (such as the CDC, WHO, etc.)

Moreover, the section suggests that the Minister provide the information available on WNV-epidemiology to the population (e.g. via the website of the FPS).

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