Healthcare and medical products
[29-11-2013 - 05:00]

Protecting public health
While member states continue to manage their health-care services and budgets, Parliament has worked to improve and clarify the rights of patients who seek treatment across borders. MEPs have also passed legislation on medicines, to boost safety and alert mechanisms and to give swifter access to cheaper, generic medicines.

Our health also depends closely on our environment – such as the air, water and chemicals around us – and on the food we consume. See the relevant sections for information on Parliament's work in those areas.

1. Cheaper and more accessible health care
Parliament approved an update to cross-border health-care rules that strengthens the right of patients to be treated in another EU country and be reimbursed at the same level as at home.

MEPs also supported shorter deadlines for approving generic medicines, in order to give patients faster access to cheaper treatments.

2. Safe, innovative and affordable medicines
MEPs approved more rapid and effective alert and withdrawal systems so that action to be taken quickly if risks or dangers are discovered with approved drugs, in the light of the "Mediator" diabetes medicine case. New legislation was also passed to stamp out the sale of counterfeit medicines.

Parliament is currently working on improving the safety of medical devices and implants, after scandals concerning defective breast implants and "metal on metal" hip devices.

Clearer rules intended to improve clinical trials of new medicines were adopted with the aim of encouraging research while at the same time protecting patients' rights. The new law will clarify the duties of ethics committees and provide details of how to obtain informed consent from patients.

3. From pandemics to smoking: reinforcing prevention in every way
Following the H1N1 flu and e.coli pandemics, the EU response system to cross-border health threats was beefed up, allowing member states to pool purchases of vaccines, thus reducing their cost in the event of a pandemic.

MEPs also adopted new legislation to control tobacco marketing with the aim of deterring young people from becoming smokers. They also endorsed safety and transparency provisions to regulate the booming business in electronic cigarettes.