

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0828/06  
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to the Commission

Subject: Chikungunya epidemic

Réunion is currently affected by a chikungunya epidemic, a painful and invalidating viral illness causing high fever, severe joint and muscle pains, as well as headaches and rashes.

This disease, for which there is currently no vaccine or medicine, is spreading exponentially. There were 22 000 known cases in January, 50 000 at the beginning of February and 130 000 (more than 15% of the population) by the end of that month. At present, 25 000 new cases are recorded each week. 47 indirect deaths have been identified to date.

The invalidating nature of the disease is now posing a threat to much of the island's economy, affecting a substantial proportion of the working population and having a negative impact on the tourist industry as a whole, which plays a major part in Réunion's dynamism and development (EUR 300 000 000 in tourist expenditure; more than 10 000 direct jobs).

France has only recently become aware of these dramatic consequences and is now endeavouring to tackle the epidemic. However, although responsibility for health care lies primarily with the Member States, the EU also has a duty to ensure that effective action is taken against such problems. This is the special task of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control which has the capacity to take rapid and coordinated action to prevent the spread of viruses.

Given its resources in this area, does the Commission intend to take action on the urgent problem of the chikungunya epidemic? What practical measures will it take as a matter of urgency to stop the spread of the virus and prevent the paralysis which is currently threatening Réunion and its economy, and seek to identify medicinal cures for the persons affected?