

Smallpox eradication: destruction of variola virus stocks

Report by the Secretariat

1. Resolution WHA49.10 (1996) recommended that the remaining stocks of live variola virus maintained by WHO since 1984 should be destroyed on 30 June 1999, after a final decision to be taken by the Health Assembly in May 1999.
2. After having considered the report of the Secretariat and the report of the WHO Ad Hoc Committee on Orthopox Virus Infections (January 1999), the Fifty-second World Health Assembly decided by resolution WHA52.10 to authorize temporary retention of the remaining variola virus stocks, subject to annual review, but up to no later than 2002, for the purpose of carrying out a programme of essential public-health research. The Fifty-fifth World Health Assembly noted that the research programme would not be completed by the end of 2002; by resolution WHA55.15 it authorized further temporary retention of these stocks for the purpose of continuing further international research.
3. After further debate on destruction of the remaining variola virus stocks by the Executive Board at its 115th session and at the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly, the Executive Board at its 117th session agreed that a working group open to all members would review a draft resolution to be submitted to the Fifty-ninth World Health Assembly. The working group met on 5 April 2006 but could not reach consensus on a draft text and submitted to the Health Assembly a draft resolution reflecting the status of its discussions.¹
4. At the Fifty-ninth World Health Assembly, a working group of Committee A considered the draft resolution without reaching a consensus on a final text. The Health Assembly therefore decided to submit the text of the draft resolution reflecting the status of the Committee A working group revisions and discussions to the Executive Board for further consideration at its 120th session.
5. At its 120th session, the Executive Board reaffirmed its commitment to the eventual destruction of remaining variola virus stocks. A drafting group examined the draft resolution,² and amended it taking account of the report of the Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research.³

¹ Document A59/10.

² See document EB119/2006–EB120/2007/REC/2, summary record of the second meeting of the 120th session of the Board, section 3 and summary record of the eleventh meeting, section 2.

³ Document EB120/39.

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

6. The Health Assembly is invited to consider the draft resolution contained in resolution EB120.R8.

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