

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Thursday 20/05/2021 at 17:00

Commissioner Kyriakides opened the meeting by welcoming participants and briefly introduced the recently adopted [EU strategy on COVID-19 therapeutics](#). The strategy has a clear aim of having three new therapeutics available by October 2021 and possibly two more by the end of the year.

Commissioner Kyriakides also informed platform members about the signature of a [third contract for vaccines](#) with the pharmaceutical companies BioNTech and Pfizer. It reserves an additional 1.8 billion doses on behalf of all EU Member States, between end 2021 and 2023.

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

The situation in the EU is improving. Case notifications and deaths are decreasing. However, case notifications remain higher than at the same period last year.

Vaccination rollout is progressing. Around 40% of the population received at least one dose of vaccine. A certain level of non-pharmaceutical interventions will nevertheless need to be maintained until a sufficient vaccination coverage is reached.

The situation regarding variants remains largely unchanged since the last platform meeting. B.1.17 remains the dominating strain in the EU. The B.1.617 variants first detected in India are still at low levels (below 5% prevalence) but are increasing, notably the B.1.617.2 lineage. More data is needed to fully understand their transmissibility, severity of infection and possible impact on immunity. ECDC currently classifies the B.1.617 (1, 2 and 3) variants as variants of interest and monitors closely the emerging evidence on their characteristics to inform any decision on a possible update of this classification. ECDC also launched a [variant dashboard](#) illustrating the circulation of variants in the EU. The agency will also further enhance its sequencing support to countries, both directly through its framework contract for sequencing, as well as via support to countries for infrastructure and training.

ECDC presented the latest development on a non-prescriptive framework for tuning public health response measures, with a tool aimed at assisting national decision-making. Platform members are encouraged to pilot the tool and provide feedback. The tool is structured along 'tiers' that are based on case notifications and death rates, using the reproduction number to derive a 'contact budget' that can be used to guide decisions on public health measures in place.

Experts welcomed the tool as a useful initiative. They discussed the tool and the methodology applied to estimate the impact of different non-pharmaceutical interventions. They also exchanged on the importance of a careful and well-informed interpretation of the results as well as on the caveats associated with any cross-country comparisons.

2. COVID-19 vaccination – State of play

EMA updated on ongoing activities in the field of therapeutics. So far, one therapeutic has been authorised for treating COVID-19 (the antiviral Veklury) and this conditional marketing authorisation has just been extended. Five more therapeutics are under evaluation, including four antibodies. EMA is also looking at immunomodulators. To date, EMA has given advice to 50 therapeutics. Overall, promising work is ongoing in this field.

Regarding vaccines, four have been authorised and four are under so-called ‘rolling reviews’. EMA should soon adopt a position on the extension of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to include young people aged 12-15.

Work also continues on additional vaccine manufacturing sites as well as on improved storage conditions. Contacts are taking place with companies on ways to ensure a swift adaptation of the composition of vaccines if necessary to react to variants of concern that would escape vaccine-induced immune response. There does not seem however to be an immediate need as available vaccines appear to be effective against variants currently circulating in EU.

Experts also touched upon the question of vaccine hesitancy, which appears to decrease in several Member States. However, the preference for specific vaccines varies a lot. According to surveys, vaccine confidence appears higher in older age groups.

3. Global Health Summit

Prof. Piot informed the platform members about the [Global Health Summit](#) taking place on 21 May. Prof. Brusafero introduced the key elements of the [input paper](#) prepared by a group of scientists to inform the political declaration to be agreed by Leaders at the Summit. The document is publicly available ([link](#)). Commissioner Kyriakides thanked the scientists involved for their work on this important document.

4. AOB

The next call is scheduled for 10 June 2021 at 1700 hours.

Participation

Platform participants:

1. Professor Markus MULLER (Austria)
2. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
3. Dr Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
4. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
5. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
6. Marika MADAROVA (Czechia)
7. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
8. Professor Arnaud FONTANET (France)
9. Dr Sotiris Tsiodras (Greece)
10. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
11. Ms Eibhlin CONNOLLY (Ireland)
12. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
13. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
14. Dr Charles Mallia AZZOPARDI (Malta)
15. Dr Aura TIMEN (The Netherlands)
16. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
17. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
18. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
19. Fernando SIMON (Spain)
20. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

- Commissioner Stella KYRIAKIDES (Chair)
- Prof. Peter PIOT, Special Advisor to the President of the European Commission
- Julia SPENCER, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
- Sandra GALLINA, Director General, DG SANTE
- Pierre DELSAUX, Deputy Director General, DG SANTE
- Roberto REIG RODRIGO, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Chrystalla PAPANASTASIOU-CONSTANTINOIU, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Thomas VAN CANGH, Policy Assistant to Director General Gallina
- Sigrid WEILAND, Scientific Assistant to the Special Advisor to the EC President on COVID-19
- Nicolas PRADALIE, Secretariat General

ECDC

- Dr Andrea AMMON, Director
- Helen JOHNSON, Expert Mathematical Modelling, Scientific Process and Methods

EMA

- Emer COOKE, Executive Director
- Marco CAVALERI, Head of the office Anti-infectives and Vaccines