

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Thursday 11/03/2021 at 17:00

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

ECDC provided an update on the epidemiological situation across the EU, which remains very serious and largely unchanged compared to the previous week. Notification rates, hospitalisations and ICU occupancy are slightly higher than last week. The death notification rate is still decreasing. Absolute values of most indicators remain high. Overall, the current situation is not favourable to lifting public health measures.

Nine countries reached the recommended level of sequencing. ECDC support currently amounts to 3000 sequences per week. By April, a larger framework contract should be in place, covering additional services.

The B.1.1.7 variant is now the dominant strain circulating the EU/EEA and has been identified in all but 2 EEA/EU countries. The B.1.351 strain is now also present at significant levels and has been identified in 18 countries. The P.1 strain has been identified in 9 countries but does not clearly seem to be increasing and most cases remain related to travel. Other variants are being monitored through EWRS but none is considered to be of concern for the moment.

Experts exchanged on outbreaks observed in different settings, notably those related to specific variants of concern. Experts also exchanged views on the clinical presentation of patients infected with different variant strains.

2. COVID-19 vaccination – State of play

The Commission informed about the Conditional Marketing Authorisation granted to the vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson. Deliveries should start in April. Deliveries for all vaccines should increase significantly over the second quarter. The Commission also informed that the export transparency and authorisation mechanism would be extended until the end of June.

EMA updated on ongoing activities, including the evaluations ongoing for additional manufacturing capacities for different vaccines.

EMA continues to monitor intensively safety signals from all vaccines and updated about recent several reports of cases of thromboembolic events and other conditions related to blood clots, reported post-vaccination with COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca. Some countries have temporarily suspended the use of a specific batch or vaccination with the AstraZeneca vaccine overall. This signal has been examined and the number of incidents appears to be below background rates. There is currently no scientific evidence to show that it is related to

the vaccine and there is no specific sign that it would be related to any specific batch. EMA issued a press statement in that respect ([link](#)). EMA is continuing to review the available evidence. In that context, EMA has been in contact with the UK where the Astrazeneca vaccine is widely used and where no increase in incidence of thrombotic event was observed.

The rolling review of the Sputnik V vaccine is at early stages and inspections are planned in Russia.

3. Presentation of the Commission's Communication adopted on 17/03

DG SANTE introduced a Communication that will be adopted on 17 March. It provides guidance to Member States on the proportionate, sustainable, safe and coordinated lifting of COVID-19 control measures. Swift and effective deployment of vaccines will be the primary driver of when and how measures can be lifted. Lessons should be learned from 2020 and avoid damaging and costly cycles of opening and closing. The Communication will propose different tools in this regard, such as an ECDC framework for reopening or a digital green certificate to facilitate free movement.

ECDC provided more details on the work to develop and operationalise its proposed framework. The thresholds defined by WHO seem appropriate for the European context. ECDC is exploring how to classify response measures into coherent groups. The framework will also factor in vaccination. As vaccination coverage increases, the degree of contacts that would not result in significant changes in R will also increase.

Regarding the Communication, experts invited to being cautious when committing to specific dates for implementation of different measures. They did however acknowledge the importance of giving a clear perspective to citizens of what is feasible if measures are adhered to and as vaccination coverage increases. Providing such perspectives and predictability was considered an important factor in addressing pandemic fatigue.

Experts also provided feedback and suggestions on the ECDC framework, e.g. on the appropriate number of tiers and related thresholds, on the indicators to use, or on the impact of testing strategies on notification rates and possible resulting bias. They also warned against the challenges of reducing complex regional and local realities to a limited set of indicators. Several Member States also described the approaches they have in place nationally to guide the introduction and lifting of measures.

4. AOB

The next call is scheduled for 18/03/2021 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. Hans-Ulrich HOLTHERM (Germany)
10. Dr. Sotiris TSIODRAS (Greece)
11. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
12. Ms Laura CASEY (Ireland)
13. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
14. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
15. Professor Edita SUZIEDELIENE (Lithuania)
16. Dr Jean-Claude Schmit (Luxembourg)
17. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
18. Professor Henrique DE BARROS (Portugal)
19. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
20. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
21. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
22. Dr Fernando SIMON (Spain)
23. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

- Commissioner Stella KYRIAKIDES (Chair)
- Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Kurt Vandenberghe, Member of Cabinet of President von der Leyen
- Sandra Gallina Director General, DG SANTE
- Prof. Peter PIOT, Special Advisor to the President of the European Commission
- Ms Julia SPENCER, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
- Roberto REIG RODRIGO, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Ralf Kuhne, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Pierre DELSAUX Deputy Director General, DG SANTE
- Cristina MODORAN, Policy Assistant to Director General Gallina
- Thomas VAN CANGH, Policy Assistant to Director General Gallina
- Jeremy BRAY, Secretariat General

- Nicolas PRADALIE, Secretariat General

ECDC

- Dr Andrea AMMON, Director
- Helen JOHNSON, Infectious Disease Modeller

EMA

- Ms Emer COOKE, Executive Director
- Marco CAVALLERI, Head of the office Anti-infectives and Vaccines
- Catherine COHET, Coordinator - Vaccine Monitoring Platform