

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Thursday 22/07/2021 at 17:00

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

Commissioner Kyriakides addressed the members of the platform about the current epidemiological situation which is changing rapidly across Member States.

ECDC provided an update on the epidemiological situation. Cases have been rising across the EU/EEA Member States but hospital admissions have been stable and the death notification has decreased. Over the last weeks, cases have been increasing among younger age groups. Delta is now the dominant variant with 70% of all sequenced samples being this variant. ECDC recommended vaccinating risk groups and the rest of the population as soon as possible and to keep social distancing measures, and contact tracing and isolation of positive cases.

Experts exchanged views on their current epidemiological and incidence rates in their countries. Most experts showed concern over the increase in incidence in young adults as a result of travel, or as a result of loosening restrictive measures. Most of the experts confirmed that the delta variant has become dominant in their countries, and that unvaccinated people account for the majority of hospitalised cases. Some countries also commented that mass events have had an impact on the incidence rate as many countries have lifted restrictions for nightclubs, bars and restaurants. Some countries are considering the use of ‘COVID-passes’ to limit the spread of virus in closed spaces.

2. COVID-19 vaccination – State of play

ECDC encouraged participants to make an effort to clearly communicate about COVID-19 vaccines, especially on effectiveness and on breakthrough infections in vaccinated people. Some experts expressed concern that people who are not vaccinated could become infected over the following weeks and months. Some participants also addressed the lack of proper communication on the first and second dose recommendations as they have seen breakthrough cases in people with the first or second dose.

Commissioner Kyriakides emphasised that the European Union now has more than enough vaccines to vaccinate 70% of adults and stressed the need to have better communication efforts to fight misinformation and put key scientific messages forward.

EMA announced that the authorisation of the Moderna vaccine for 12-17 year old individuals would come on 23 July. EMA also started the rolling review of the Sanofi vaccine ([Vidprevtyn](#))

and will probably have more information later in the year. On adverse events, EMA reported there have not been a lot of new adverse events but rare side effects. On the mRNA vaccines a warning on myocarditis and pericarditis was included in the listing as well as the Guillain-Barré syndrome as a very rare side effect of the COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen, similar to the Vaxzevria vaccine. EMA continues to review the filling lines and manufacturing capacity to increase the availability of vaccines. Regarding therapeutics, four candidates (monoclonal antibodies) are currently in rolling review.

EMA and ECDC published a [joint statement on 14 July](#) on several aspects including the need for Member States to fully vaccinate their population as soon as possible.

On booster doses, EMA explained they have been discussing with all companies and gathering data to support the third dose, but at the moment there does not seem to be a need for it. EMA clarified that even if the data does not yet show a need for it, they want to make sure companies are ready to produce it if needed.

On mixing-and-matching vaccines, EMA explained there is good scientific grounds for this strategy to be safe and effective and allow the population to be protected, they will continue to review the results of studies done in Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom and monitor the situation.

3. Recommendations on non-pharmaceutical interventions and mitigation measures for mass gathering events

Some Member States wanted to know what the threshold should be for lifting or imposing restrictions, as the pandemic situation evolves, and there is social pressure for imposing new restrictive measures. The ECDC reminded the experts that they have developed a [framework for tuning COVID-19 response measures](#), which can still be used in the context of the Delta variant. The ECDC emphasised the need to re-define the parameters as the pandemic evolves given that the incidence rates are shifting due to vaccination. The ECDC also highlighted that school closures should be a last resort in controlling the pandemic due to the severe ramifications of this measure on children and adolescents. Instead, the focus should be on vaccinating teachers, putting in place social distancing measures in schools and having class shifts.

4. Conclusions and suggestions for future agenda points

The next call will take place on 6 August 2021 at 17:00, and through the month of August there will only be two calls.

Participation

1. Professor Markus MÜLLER (Austria)
2. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
3. Dr Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
4. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
5. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
6. Roman CHIBLEK/Marika MADAROVA (Czechia)
7. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
8. Dr. Hans-Ulrich HOLTHERM (Germany)
9. Professor Sotiris TSIODRAS (Greece)
10. Mr Ronan Glynn (Ireland)
11. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
12. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
13. Dr Jean - Claude Schmit (Luxembourg)
14. Professor Henrique DE BARROS (Portugal)
15. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
16. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
17. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
18. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

- Commissioner Stella KYRIAKIDES (Chair)
- Giorgos ROSSIDES, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- 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
- Roberto REIG RODRIGO, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Chrystalla PAPANASTASIOU-CONSTANTINOIU, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Cristina MODORAN, Policy Assistant to Director General, DG SANTE
- Ingrid KELLER, acting Head of Unit, Health Security Unit, DG SANTE
- Katherine POOLE-LEHNOFF, Policy Officer, DG SANTE
- Peter WAGNER, Secretariat General

ECDC

- Andrea AMMON, Director

EMA

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