



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Public health
Health Security

Luxembourg, 20 December 2023

**General Working Group of the Health Security Committee
Audio meeting**

Report

Chair: Head of Unit, DG SANTE B2, European Commission

Participants: AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, FI, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LU, LT, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, DG HERA, DG SANTE, ECDC, WHO

Agenda points:

1. Overview of respiratory virus epidemiology in the EU/EEA (COVID-19, FLU, RSV) – ECDC
2. EU4Health Work Programme 2024
 - a. DG SANTE actions on health security – DG SANTE B2
 - b. DG HERA actions relevant for health security – DG HERA
3. Presentation of the concept note on the EUHTF (EU Health Task Force) – ECDC
4. Draft planning of ECDC assessments under Art 8 of SCBTH – ECDC
5. AOB

Main messages:

1. Overview of respiratory virus epidemiology in the EU/EEA (COVID-19, FLU, RSV) – ECDC

According to the latest ECDC updates the epidemiological situation for **COVID-19, influenza and RSV in the EU/EEA remains similar** to the data presented at the previous HSC meeting held on 13 Dec 2023. The test positivity rates for SARS-CoV-2 (23%) and influenza (8%) continue to increase, but leveled out for RSV (11%). For **COVID-19**, the most impacted age groups remain the 15 – 64 years old and **65 + years**. Both sentinel and non-sentinel data show similar **increase of the hospital and ICU admission** for the 65 + years. There are currently no SARS-CoV-2 variants meeting the “variant of concern” criteria. Among the four main circulating variants, **BA.2.86** is the one increasing and could potentially take over to become **predominant in 2024**. More specifically, the sub lineage JN.1 is accountable for the BA.2.86 growth and will be considered as target in the monovalent XBB.1.5 vaccine. For influenza the situation hasn’t changed, with subtypes A being dominant. ECDC highlighted again the importance of the potential impact and management of other respiratory pathogens. ECDC presented the **preliminary data of the pilot study of the COVID-19 vaccination coverage** in the EU/EEA collected between 01 Sep to 13 Dec 2023. As the vaccination campaigns are still ongoing the interim results presented will not be published. The next report will be made available in the second half of Jan 2024. Guidance and information regarding the ECDC work can be found the ECDC [webpage](#). On request from IE, ECDC will consider preparing a map showing vaccination rates against the COVID-19 cases in EU/EEA countries.

2. EU4Health Work Programme 2024

- a. DG SANTE actions on health security – DG SANTE B2

The **Annual Work Program for 2024 of the EU4Health Programme** has been published on **05 Dec 2023** and related information can be consulted through the Commission [website](#). A total budget of **EUR 485 517 000** has been allocated to **Crisis Preparedness**. DG SANTE B2 presented the following **actions on health security** to be launched in 2024:

Calls for proposals:

- DP/CR-g-24-29 Call for proposals on health promotion and prevention of noncommunicable and communicable diseases, including vaccine-preventable and other cancers caused by infections, and on smoke- and aerosol-free environments (EUR 3 500 000)

Procurement:

- CP-p-24-7 Union preparedness: Organisation of Trainings in the field of preparedness and response to Serious Cross-Border Health Threats (SCBHT) (EUR 2 500 000)
- CP-p-24-5 Study supporting the ECDC Evaluation (EUR 500 000)

Indirect management

- CP-CA-24-3 Early Warning and Response System, implementation of Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 for the period of 2024-2027 (EUR 1 500 000)
- CP-CA-24-9 Antimicrobial Resistance Interventions and Projections (EUR 600 000)
- CP-CA-24-6 Antimicrobial resistance and healthcare associated infections (EUR 1 000 000)
- CP-CA-24-8 Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) approach as tool to suppress yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) on Cyprus and to build capacity for the use of this vector control technique in the Union (EUR 500 000)
- CP-CA-24-4 Public health risk assessments (EUR 600 000)

A budget has also been attributed for several actions on **other topics** with importance to communicable diseases:

- HS-p-24-57 Regulatory coherence on Substances of Human Origin based therapies (EUR 500 000)
- HS-p-24-59 Organisational support to Member States to implement the new Regulation on Substances of Human Origin (EUR 5 400 000)
- HS-p-24-60 Development of a Substances of Human Origin (SoHO) digital platform – SoHO-X (EUR 2 822 000)
- HS- CA-24-58 Support for Substances of Human Origin (EUR 6 556 000)
- DP-CA-24-95.½: Supporting Long COVID patients: insights and action (OECD EUR 1 500 000, WHO EUR 500 000)
- DP-g-24-33.½: Call for proposals for operating grants in 2024, and call for proposals for a Framework Partnership Agreement for operating grants (2025-2026) to nongovernmental organisations: financial contribution to the functioning of health nongovernmental bodies implementing one or more specific objectives of Regulation (EU) 2021/522 (EUR 9 000 000)
- OA-g-24-79 Call for proposals: action grants to contribute to the organisation of conferences and events (EUR 450 000)

b. DG HERA actions relevant for health security – DG HERA

DG HERA gave an overview of its actions relevant for crisis preparedness in relation to medical countermeasures (EUR 470 817 000). The allocated budget will be distributed through three different mechanisms:

Grants:

- CP-g-24-10 Call for proposals on the European Hub for vaccine development (EUR 102 000 000)

- CP-g-24-11 Call for proposals for next-generation respiratory protection (EUR 20 000 000)
- CP-g-24-12 Call for proposals to support innovative manufacturing technologies and processes in the Union for medicines production (EUR 17 000 000)
- CP-g-24-13 Direct grants to Member States' authorities: Support to the development of sustainable, forward-looking national and Union stockpiling strategies (joint action) (EUR 17 000 000)
- CP-g-24-105 Call for proposals to support the development of novel antivirals (EUR 10 000 000)

Procurement:

- CP-p-24-14 Ever-warm facilities (EU FAB) for vaccines production – the Commission's Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) (EUR 160 000 000)
- CP-p-24-15 Support to speed up the development of access to and/or uptake of medical countermeasures including critical medicines (EUR 40 000 000)
- CP-p-24-16 Support innovation, supply capacity and access to critical medicines and antimicrobials (EUR 50 000 000)
- CP-p-24-17 Support to the Commission on gathering intelligence on priority threats and medical countermeasures (EUR 500 000)
- CP-p-24-18 Establishment of a global wastewater sentinel system (EUR 8 000 000)
- CP-p-24-19 Purchase, innovation and deployment of medical countermeasures in emergency situations (no budget allocated, to be mobilized in case of emergency)
- CP-p-24-90 HERA's training and exercise programme for management of medical countermeasures (EUR 3 417 000)

Indirect management:

- CP-CA-24-92 Supporting the development of antibiotics to strengthen global preparedness and response; to WHO and GARDP (EUR 20 000 000)
- CP-CO-24-91 Blending under the Thematic Innovation financial product implemented by the European Investment Bank under the Invest EU Programme; to EIB (EUR 10 000 000)
- CP-CA-24-93 Support for implementing the diagnostics component of the 100 days mission; to Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (EUR 11 600 000)
- CP-CA-24-94.1/2 Support strategies, capacity and data for global wastewater and environmental surveillance; to WHO and UNEP (EUR 3 000 000 + EUR 3 800 000)
- CP-CA-24-107 Supporting logistical operations for medical countermeasures in Africa (HERA) to WHO (EUR 1 500 000)

3. Presentation of the concept note on the EU Health Task Force (EUHTF) – ECDC

The **new ECDC mandate** includes the task to establish the European Union Health Task Force (EUHTF). The EUHTF can **support emergency preparedness and response in the EU and globally**. DG SANTE is preparing the legal base through an implementing act. The role of ECDC is to create and coordinate the EUHTF with support and collaboration of the European Commission, EU/EEA Member States (MS) and EU partners. The EUHTF is a **flexible body, mobilised in different situations and under different mechanisms** and **provides a remote support as well as rapid in-country field deployment**. It is composed of:

- **ECDC Coordination Team** of public health experts, emergency operations center staff and administrative assistants: a permanent entity coordinating EUHTF activities;
- **Enhanced Emergency Capacity** team of ECDC staff/fellows and EU/EEA MS experts: EUHTF pools available for field deployment/missions, remote technical support and knowledge and practice sharing.

National health authorities, EC, WHO, Global Outbreak Alert and Response Networks (GOARNs) and non-governmental organization can request the EUHTF support through the ECDC [website](#). Following a request, ECDC will evaluate and disseminate it according to the needs. The funding of the EUHTF will be carried out by ECDC (routine expenses), ECDC/DG ECHO/GOARN (deployment related expenses) and the organization employing the EUHTF experts (expert's salary). The ECDC Coordination Team is assisted by EUHTF's external governance bodies:

- to support establishment of EUHTF (**ad hoc EUHTF Working Group**: ECDC, 6 selected MSs, EC DGs (SANTE, ECHO, HERA, RTD), WHO-GOARN): quarterly meeting in 2023
- to support operation of the EUHTF (**EUHTF Advisory Group**: ECDC, 6 selected MSs, EC DGs (SANTE, ECHO, HERA, RTD), EMA, WHO-EURO, MSF, EUPHA): from 2024, meet every 6 months, two-year rotations.

EUHTF reports annually to the Advisory Forum and the Management Board of ECDC.

4. Draft planning of ECDC assessments under Art 8 of SCBTH – ECDC

ECDC assessments under Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 on SCBHT will be initiated in 2024 and extended into 2026. On DG SANTE's side the delegated act for the article 8 is expected to be completed by March 2024. Nine EU/EEA countries (**BE, EE, FI, LU, MT, NL, PT, ES, SE**) expressed an interest in being assessed as part of the first cycle that will take place **between April and December 2024**. The countries can send their preferred dates for the assessment to take place to DG SANTE and ECDC. The assessment process will consist of:

- A **documentary review** of around 4 weeks where the assessment team will go through relevant documents and guides provided by the country. A list of relevant documents will be shared in advance.
- A **country visit**, of 2 to 5 working days, where the assessment team will meet with national experts to discuss the state of implementation of the prevention, preparedness and response plans.
- An **ECDC report** with recommendations incorporating the feedback from the country.
- An **action plan**, if applicable, produced by the country addressing the recommendations provided.

ECDC will provide practical information and logistical arrangements, including the detailed assessment methodology. During the meeting **IE, HR, LT, DE, HU and LI** informed that they will be reaching out to ECDC to plan the assessment.

5. AOB

- According to Article 7 the MS are expected to provide the EC with an **updated report on prevention, preparedness, and response planning on reporting by 27 December 2023**. Currently only 3 countries have marked all instruments as completed and locked all instruments indicating final submission. The remaining countries are invited to complete the questionnaires in REDCap by 27 December 2023. ECDC regularly monitors the REDCap questionnaire and contacts countries when they identify potential issues. So far communication is going well, and they are available to provide prompt support of the Reporting Officer as needed.
- The committee was informed that the final version of the **HSC opinion on Avian Influenza** has been shared with the senior level HSC members on 19 December 2023.
- A **senior level HSC meeting will take place online on 25 January 2024**, chaired by Director General of DG SANTE to give an update on the negotiations of the pandemic treaty and the up-date of the International Health Regulations.
- The **next regular General Working Group online meeting** will take place on 10 or 17 January 2024.