



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

General Working Group of the Health Security Committee Meeting

Thursday, 02 May 2024 – 10:30-12:00

Summary Report

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

Participants: AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LI, LT, LMT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, IS, NO, DG SANTE, DG ECHO, DG HERA, EMA, EUROPOL, ECDC, WHO

EU/EEA only

Agenda points

1. Preparedness against communicable diseases and CBRN threats for mass gathering events
2. Information point on pertussis
3. Summary of EC actions on vaccination
4. EU Reference Laboratories (EURLs) for Public Health – 2024 calls for application
5. AOB

Key messages:

1. Preparedness against communicable diseases and CBRN threats for mass gathering events

Germany gave an overview on the preparations for the UEFA EURO 2024 that is taking place in June 2024 across different cities in Germany. The Ministry of Health will provide support to local authorities and will have special response units readily available to respond to any biological incidents.

ECDC presented on their epidemic intelligence monitoring for large mass gathering events, which are any with more than half a million participants and spectators. Depending on the countries' request, ECDC provides support to monitor before, during and after the events. ECDC provides tools and communication plans, in cooperation with the hosting country and the World Health Organization (WHO). For mass gathering events, ECDC uses regular monitoring tools, but also publicly available sources. ECDC is preparing an overview document on ongoing communicable disease events in the EU/EEA and globally, including recommendations to understand the risks of these events during the summer. For the EURO 2024, ECDC is already collaborating with Germany regarding risk assessment and monitoring. For the Paris 2024 Olympics and Para-Olympics, ECDC will provide France with active monitoring, including through a dashboard to provide information on the event, and threat assessment.

EUROPOL gave an overview of their role in assessing CBRN threats, which includes collecting, processing and disseminating information on the threats, and provide threat assessments based on the information collected. EUROPOL combines its efforts with ECDC as well as other agencies to develop threat assessments.

WHO provided an overview on their technical support to mass gathering events. WHO's key role is to provide guidance and support to Member States and event organizers. A strategic risk assessment is provided throughout the cycle of the event, including before, during and after. During this cycle, the WHO supports with risk management, including risk evaluation, mitigation, communication, and event-based surveillance. WHO produces health advice for travellers, and participants in different languages and before the event takes place. For the EURO in Germany WHO has a special taskforce and will provide event-based surveillance, and publish public health/travel advice, jointly with ECDC and Germany. For the Paris Olympics and Para-Olympics, WHO will support France with a simulation exercise and similar activities it is carrying out with Germany.

2. Information point on pertussis

ECDC is preparing a Risk Assessment on pertussis¹ given the increase of cases in the EU/EEA. After a few years of limited circulation in the EU/EEA, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 25 000 cases of pertussis were reported in 2023, and more than 32 000 between January and March 2024. The observed epidemiological picture can be ascribed to factors including expected epidemic peaks, waning immunity, presence of unvaccinated individuals, as well as likely decreased contribution of natural boosting in the overall population during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The overall risk is assessed as high for unimmunised or partially immunised infants under 6 months of age, as they represent the group with highest morbidity and mortality from pertussis. Infants older than 6 months and children up to 15 years of age have a moderate risk if they are unimmunised or partially immunised and have a low risk if they are fully vaccinated according to national immunisation schedules. ECDC provided recommendations for Member States to consider, especially achieving and sustaining high vaccination coverage, increase awareness of health professionals, continue surveillance, and employ risk communication.

The Netherlands provided an overview of the epidemiological situation and response given the increase in pertussis cases. In 2024, there have been a total of 5,303 reported cases of whooping cough, including 375 infants. These figures are very high compared to previous years and compared to the years before the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly half of all babies with whooping cough were admitted to hospital. The Netherlands explained that some reasons to explain these increases include critical attitudes towards vaccination, low maternal vaccine coverage and shortages of vaccines to update immunization status.

Bulgaria reported 524 cases of pertussis in 2024, with most cases being reported in Sofia. The most affected group is children up to one year of age, with 92 hospitalizations, 21 complications, and 2 reported deaths. Bulgaria has put in place measures including spreading information about the disease, providing notes to doctors and general practitioners to increase awareness, making PCR tests more accessible, and increasing the possibility of administering vaccines to pregnant women.

Poland reported an increase in pertussis cases in 2024 compared to previous years. Poland explained that some of the reasons for the deteriorating situation include decline in the acceptance of vaccines, and vaccine misinformation.

3. Summary of EC actions on vaccination

DG SANTE gave an update on its work on vaccination. The Commission has adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers, which is currently being negotiated in the Council. This Recommendation aims at supporting EU Member States in fighting cancers caused by

¹ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/increase-pertussis-cases-eueea-infants-under-six-months-age-highest-risk>

Human papillomaviruses and Hepatitis B virus through recommendations, focused on boosting vaccination, and closing data gaps. Under the Public Health Expert Group, the subgroup on vaccination is advising the Commission on how to support Member States to increase vaccine uptake. The EU4Health Programme has funded several actions. The European Commission has also launched an information campaign ([#UnitedinProtection](#)).

4. EU Reference Laboratories (EURLs) for Public Health – 2024 calls for application

DG SANTE announced that the [second round of applications for EURLs for public health](#) was launched. This time, the calls are to nominate EURLs in the areas of food- and water-borne diseases. The calls are open for labs in EU/EEA countries that play an active role in a national and/or EU-level public health microbiology system. An information webinar will take place on 15 May 2024 for interested laboratories and national competent authorities. The deadline to apply is 14 August 2024.

5. AOB – Presentation by HERA

DG HERA provided information on an upcoming workshop in June 2024 to work with Member States to estimate the quantities of medical countermeasures (MCM) to address CBRN threats in the EU.

DG HERA also informed about a simulation exercise of biological and cross-border health threats with Member States that will take place in October 2024. The simulation exercise will help address response to these threats by looking at access and availability of MCMs, and to allow for the exchange of information.

6. AOB - MEDEVAC request from WHO

DG SANTE informed that WHO has requested the activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism to evacuate patients from Gaza. Relevant information is available on EWRS, and a meeting will likely be held in the week of 6 May 2024.