

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Monday 11/04/2022 at 15:00

1. Ukraine – current health challenges and EU action

Commissioner Kyriakides updated the participants on her recent discussion with the Ukrainian Minister of Health. She reiterated the Commission's commitment to provide all health support possible. ECDC has deployed a team on the ground in Poland. The Commission is working with the Red Cross to ensure the transport of patients to border crossing points from which they can be evacuated. Ukraine also expressed a need for medical teams from EU Member States to be deployed on the ground.

Participants from frontline Member States experiencing large inflows of refugees - many of whom in need of medical attention - updated on the situation in their country.

ECDC also provided the latest information, based on regular meetings held with the five neighbouring countries, to which other countries are now also being associated. The overall assessment is that the influx of people is stable. Access to healthcare services and vaccination appears to be offered in all countries. Access to health records and registries from Ukraine proves to be challenging for the moment. Vaccine hesitancy among displaced people is reported as a concern. However, access to Covid-19 certificates now allows to know the vaccination status of incoming persons. Work on enhancing wastewater surveillance is also ongoing in many Member States. The ECDC team posted in Poland since 16 March is working in very close collaboration with the Polish Ministry of Health and the national public health institute. ECDC continues to produce technical guidance for Member States. Most recently, ECDC published guidelines for individual health assessments by healthcare workers as well as infographics on vaccination ([link](#))

2. COVID-19 Epidemiological situation and update on vaccines and therapeutics

Commissioner Kyriakides updated on recent discussions among health ministers concerning vaccination.

ECDC updated on the current epidemiological situation, with a second wave of Omicron that has peaked in most countries. Overall, at EU level, trends in incidence are going downwards, including in the population group above 65 years. Mortality is overall decreasing. Transmission remains nevertheless very high, and is probably higher than actually measured since testing levels have decreased. There is no discernible impact associated with the inflow of refugees and no major increases in cases has been observed from countries with largest inflows of refugees from Ukraine. Severe cases, notably in

individuals over 65 years of age, continue to occur mainly among unvaccinated individuals. Forecasting is becoming increasingly complex given the incomplete data collection and reporting on key indicators such as ICU admissions. In terms of vaccination uptake, the four Member States with the lowest coverage are also the four with the largest number of incoming refugees from Ukraine.

EMA informed on the joint statement published on 6 April with ECDC regarding the administration of a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccines ([link](#)). Agencies reviewed the limited available evidence and suggested a staged approach, concluding that a fourth dose (or second booster) can be given to adults 80 years of age and above after reviewing data on the higher risk of severe COVID-19 in this age group and the protection provided by a fourth dose. ECDC and EMA also noted that there is currently no clear evidence in the EU that vaccine protection against severe disease is waning substantially in adults with normal immune systems aged 60 to 79 years and thus no clear evidence to support the immediate use of a fourth dose. No safety signal following the administration of a fourth dose has been identified so far. Both agencies stress the importance to continue to increase coverage with the primary series and booster doses. EMA is currently reviewing data on vaccine candidates by Sanofi Pasteur, Valneva, and HIPRA. The agency is expecting data on boosters from Novavax, and on modified vaccines under development by Pfizer/BioNtech and Moderna.

In the field of therapeutics, EMA is reviewing data on the impact of different variants on the effectiveness of monoclonal antibodies such as Evusheld (which appears to be more effective against the BA.2 Omicron subvariant) or Xevudy (possibly more effective against BA.1). Regarding antivirals, EMA is collecting data on the effectiveness of Paxlovid in the context of the omicron spread.

Participants exchanged on the epidemiological situation, and national approaches regarding the administration of a 4th vaccine dose. Experts also exchanged on the importance of factoring in the ideal interval between doses in view of possible need for future additional doses in the autumn. Overall, the discussion highlighted the importance of local epidemiology to inform decisions on vaccinations.

3. Conclusions and suggestions for future agenda points

The next meeting is scheduled on 27 April at 1615 hours.

Participation

Member States participants:

1. Dr Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
2. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
3. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
4. Professor Helene PROBST (Denmark)
5. Professor Sotiris TSIODRAS (Greece)
6. Dr Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
7. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
8. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
9. Professor Diana PAUN (Romania)
10. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
11. Professor Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

12. Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
13. Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
14. Sandra Gallina, Director General, DG SANTE
15. Pierre Delsaux, Director General, HERA
16. John F. Ryan, Acting Deputy Director General, DG SANTE
17. Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
18. Ralf Kuhne, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
19. Daphne Von Buxhoeveden, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
20. Thomas Van Cangh, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
21. Sigrid Weiland, Policy Officer, Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE
22. Hanna Herzig, HERA
23. Hellen Johnson, HERA
24. Georgios Pepios, Trainee – Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
25. Florian Bikard, Trainee – Cabinet of Vice President Schinas

ECDC:

26. Karl Ekdahl, Head of Disease Programmes
27. Lucia Pastore, Head of Vaccine Preventable Diseases Programme
28. Agoritsa Baka, Senior Expert
29. Antonis Lanaras, Head of Section European and International Cooperation

EMA:

30. Emer Cooke, Director
31. Marco Cavaleri, Head of the office Anti-infectives and Vaccines
32. Zigmar Sebris, Strategic Support and Crisis Coordination Officer