

## Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

### Meeting Report

Friday 20/11/2020 at 17:00

#### 1. Epidemiological update

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ECDC provided an epidemiological update of the situation in the EU. Several key parameters monitored seem to be **stabilising, albeit at a high level**. The overall 14-day case notification rate remains the same as last week, with an average of 608 cases notified per 100,000 population for the EU, including wide variations between countries, ranging from 54 to 1303.

The second parameter that seems to be stabilising is the occupancy rate of intensive care units (at around 82% of the peak ICU occupancy observed during the pandemic), leaving a limited buffer in case of further increase. Thirdly, test positivity is also stabilising, sometimes also at high level, with nine countries reporting positivity rates above 20%.

One parameter that is still increasing is the death rate in spite of measures in place, which could be explained by the lag time between infection and onset of symptoms, hospitalisation and death. As a conclusion, there is **no indication that measures in place to contain the spread of the virus can be lifted**.

#### 2. Quarantine and isolation

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Commissioner Kyriakides opened the discussion with the experts on the topic of the meeting, i.e. approaches to isolation of cases and quarantine both for contacts of cases and for travellers. She also recalled the current ECDC recommendations, notably:

- 14-day [quarantine](#) for contacts, that can be shortened to 10 days with a negative test on day 10;
- 10-day [isolation](#) for mild cases starting from symptom onset with minimum 3 days without fever/symptom before release ;
- No recommendation for quarantines of travellers at the current stage of the pandemic with widespread circulation of the virus throughout Europe.

Prof Piot stressed the importance of adopting evidence-based measures encompassing a broad societal perspective, tapping into the range of social sciences and disciplines that inform public health. It is imperative to set clear overall objectives and adapt to evolving situations and local circumstances, while ensuring that recommendations can be followed in practice. He also emphasised the importance of developing a common understanding of the different concepts at play. Finally, he highlighted the need to closely monitor and document changes resulting from a modification in approach.

Members of the platform subsequently exchanged on these topics, sharing useful experiences on the way they approach common challenges. Overall, similar patterns are observed across

countries, with slight variations around a common theme, including the regular use of testing. While they acknowledged the added value of EU coordination on travel-related measures, notably to ensure their credibility and effectiveness, many experts pointed out the importance of taking local considerations and evolving situations into account, while at the same time avoiding excessively frequent changes in measures. A coordinated EU position was perceived as most useful on issues with cross border implications, but less critical for local measures on isolation and quarantine.

Regarding **quarantine of contacts**, participants emphasised the need for pragmatism and consideration for the local context. While most follow a 14-day recommendation, several countries have implemented shorter quarantine periods, sometimes combined with testing, with a view to limit societal disruptions and increase compliance. Overall, countries with shorter quarantines have so far not observed an increase in cases resulting from the residual risk associated with shorter durations. Experts also exchanged on the definition of contacts and on the approaches to be followed in different instances (e.g. need for quarantine of classes after infection of one pupil, or for previously infected persons with antibodies that are re-exposed).

Regarding the **isolation of cases**, national approaches tend to be similar. Several participants shared their approaches for the isolation of infected healthcare workers, especially in a context of staff shortage where it is important that they can return to work in safe conditions for themselves, their colleagues and patients. Most experts also described specific isolation measures, combined with testing, in place for the release of different groups, such as hospitalised and severe cases, residents in a closed vulnerable population setting or immunocompromised patients.

Most countries have some **measures in place for incoming travellers**, based on testing requirements and/or quarantine. While many recognised their limited effectiveness to control the spread of the virus at the current stage of the outbreak, several called for a coordinated approach once it will have been contained to avoid reintroductions from higher- to lower-incidence areas. A common European approach, possibly based on a smart testing scheme (with uniform requirements for a test pre-departure or soon after arrival) and /or the use of passenger locator forms would be useful once case numbers go down. In the case of islands, the feasibility of preventing re-introductions could further strengthen the relevance of measures for travellers.

In his conclusion, Prof Piot indicated that, as the understanding of the epidemiology of the disease progresses, and given the rapid progress in the performance of tests, Member States will be able to further refine their approaches over time. Ultimately, the main issue may be one of compliance resulting from societal acceptance and applicability of the measures. He also emphasised the importance of adopting policies with a long-term perspective, and the need to start preparing for lower transmission levels (e.g. with the support of ECDC guidance) while tackling the current high number of cases.

Commissioner Kyriakides thanked the participants for their useful contributions and stressed the importance of a unified approach where it brings added value. The topic of isolation and

quarantine will be taken up in the Health Security Committee, with the aim of adopting a joint statement in the coming days with the ECDC's support whenever different options might be explored.

The next meeting of the Scientific Advice platform is planned on 3 December at 15:30. The topic will be vaccines and the agenda will cover vaccination strategies, vaccines deployment, communication on vaccination and an update by the Commission on the procurement of vaccines.

## Participation

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### Platform participants:

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. Dr Roman CHLIBEK, Marika MADAROVA (Czechia)
7. Dr Helene BILSTED PROBST (Denmark)
8. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
9. Professor Taneli PUUMALAINEN (Finland)
10. Professor Arnaud FONTANET (France)
11. Dr. Hans-Ulrich HOLTHERM (Germany)
12. Sotiris TSIODRAS (Greece)
13. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
14. Ronan GLYNN (Ireland)
15. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
16. Dr Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
17. Professor Edita FYI SUZIEDELIENE (Lithuania)
18. Dr Jean- Claude SCHMIT (Luxembourg)
19. Dr Charles MALLIA AZZOPARDI (Malta)
20. Dr Aura TIMEN (The Netherlands)
21. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
22. Professor Henrique DE BARROS (Portugal)
23. Mrs Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
24. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
25. Mr. Milan KREK (Slovenia)
26. Fernando SIMÓN (Spain)
27. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

### European Commission:

- Commissioner Stella KYRIAKIDES (Chair)
- Prof. Peter PIOT, Special Advisor to the President of the European Commission
- Director General Sandra GALLINA, DG SANTE
- Giorgos ROSSIDES, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Roberto REIG RODRIGO, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Ines PRAINSACK, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Chrystalla PAPANASTASIOU, Policy Assistant in the Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Andrea AMMON, Director ECDC
- Jeremy BRAY, Secretariat General
- Thomas VAN CANGH, Policy Assistant to Director General Gallina