Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Wednesday 24/11/2021 at 18:00

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

ECDC presented its latest **risk assessment** published on 24 November (link), including modelling results to year end. The modelling considers the impacts of booster using the latest available data. Forecasts highlight the need for non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) as an immediate measure to control transmission, in combination with rollout of vaccine booster doses for adults, which should be prioritised for those aged 40 years and over, at least six months after completing a primary vaccine schedule. Booster doses will sustain transmission control beyond the immediate impact of implementing NPIs.

Consequently, the assessment concludes with three recommendations:

- close the immunity gaps in eligible groups;
- consider booster doses urgently for those over 40 and for all over 18 at least six months after completing the primary series;
- Non-pharmaceutical interventions should be introduced early and maintained for a sufficiently long period.

ECDC also reported on its interactions with Member States facing challenges with vaccination rollout. Some common issues are being addressed immediately, while more country-specific interventions are discussed bilaterally with each country in view of their implementation.

Experts discussed a range of topics covering:

- epidemiological trends across Europe, reflecting a concerning – yet very diverse – situation;
- Progress and challenges with vaccination rollout, with strong consensus on the need to continue efforts to reach a very high vaccination coverage;
- Booster policies;
- Rules and practices around the use of Digital Covid Certificates;
- Possible drivers of the current wave, including factors such as seasonality, the lifting of non-pharmaceutical interventions or the waning effectiveness of vaccines against transmission.
- Non-pharmaceutical interventions, with several experts expressing concerns regarding the decreasing effectiveness of some of these measures caused by drops in compliance.

The Belgian representative informed about an imminent publication of a thematic report on vaccination coverage and the impact of vaccination up to end October that shows an overall

waning of the effectiveness over time after the primary vaccination series, in particular against infection in the elderly. (link)

1. COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics

EMA updated the platform on ongoing work on **vaccines**. Some of the upcoming vaccines currently under review are based on different technology platforms than those already available. EMA intends to finalise its assessment of the Cormirnaty vaccine for 5-11 year old, containing a third of the active substance included in the the adult formulation. EMA is also reviewing the data submitted for the Spikevax vaccine for 6-11 year old (containing half of the active substance contained in the adult formulation), with a view to issue an opinion in December. Experts discussed the availability of appropriate syringes as a possible bottleneck. The review of the data for a variation on boosting the Jansen vaccine will be completed in December. Finally, EMA is collecting data on heterologous boosting and expects to publish a scientific position on this issue next week. Booster doses in general seem to generate a very high antibody response, higher than levels reached after the primary series. If well timed, boosters could therefore be of significant help throughout the winter months.

Regarding **therapeutics**, EMA issued a scientific opinion on Molnupiravir allowing its use in early access schemes at national level. The Marketing Authorisation procedure is expected to be finalised by the end of the year.

Considering the complexity of the situation and the need for clear explanations, Commissioner Kyriakides encouraged experts to develop coherent communication lines around common themes. This topic will be taken up in a future meeting.

2. AOB

The next meeting is scheduled on Wednesday 8 December at 16:00

Participation

Member States participants:

1. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
2. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
3. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
4. Professor Helene PROBST (Denmark)
5. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
6. Professor Taneli PUUMALAINEN (Finland)
7. Dr Hans-Ulrich HOLTHERM (Germany)
8. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
9. Dr Darina O'FLANAGAN (Ireland)
10. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
11. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
12. Professor Edita SUZIEDELIENE (Lithuania)
13. Jean-Claude SCHMIT (Luxembourg)
14. Dr Charles MALLIA AZZOPARDI (Malta)
15. Professor Aura TIMEN (The Netherlands)
16. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
17. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
18. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
19. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
20. Professor Fernando SIMÓN (Spain)
21. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

22. Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
23. Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
24. Anna Carnegie, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
25. Sandra Gallina, Director General, DG SANTE
26. Pierre Delsaux, Deputy Director General, DG SANTE, Acting Head, HERA
27. Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
28. Annukka Ojala, Deputy Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
29. Kurt Vandenberghe, Member of Cabinet of President von der Leyen
30. Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
31. Chrystalla Papanastasiou-Constantinou, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
32. Thomas Van Cangh, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
33. Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
34. Sigrid Weiland, Policy Officer, Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE
35. Peter Wagner, Secretariat General
36. Nicolas Pradalie, Secretariat General

ECDC

37. Andrea Ammon, Director

EMA

38. Emer Cooke, Executive Director
39. Marco Cavaleri , Head of the office Anti-infectives and Vaccines