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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Public health, country knowledge, crisis management
Crisis management and preparedness in health

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Audio meeting of the Health Security Committee – 17 January 2020

Public Flash report

the cluster of pneumonia cases associated with novel Coronavirus in Wuhan, China

Chair: DG SANTE C3

Audio participants: AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, NL, NO, SE, ES, UK, ECDC, DG RTD, WHO Euro

The Chair welcomed the Members of the Health Security Committee (HSC) as well as representatives from ECDC, WHO and DG RTD. The Chair presented the agenda and noted that the audio meeting was convened to discuss the cases of pneumonia associated with a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China.

No further points were added to the agenda.

1. Risk assessment on cluster of pneumonia cases associated with novel coronavirus – Wuhan, China

The Chair presented the background of the current cluster of pneumonia cases associated with a novel corona virus. On 31 December 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health and Health Commission informed about a cluster of 27 pneumonia cases of unknown aetiology, including seven severe cases, with a common exposure in Wuhan's South China Seafood City market, indicating a possible exposure link to animals.

The Chair noted that as of 17th of January, 59 cases have been reported in Wuhan. A total of 44 cases (41 in Wuhan and 3 outside of China) are laboratory confirmed cases infected with a novel (or new) coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Two cases with chronic and severe underlying conditions died. Overall, 763 close contacts have been identified of which none tested positive for the novel coronavirus, so far. Following this, there have been suspected pneumonia cases with recent travel history to Wuhan, China, reported in Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan and Vietnam. Three confirmed cases have been reported outside of China. Two cases in Thailand, reported following entry screening at the airport, who travelled to Wuhan. The two cases are not related. The first case did not visit the Wuhan Seafood Market. One case in Japan, who visited Wuhan and was hospitalized once he travelled back to Japan. The case also did not visit the Wuhan Seafood Market but had contact with a person with symptoms of pneumonia.

As of 16th of January, there is no clear indication of sustained human-to-human transmission and the WHO, as of present, does not recommend any specific measures for travellers and advises against any travel or trade restrictions. Usual precautions should be applied.

Following this event, neighbouring territories such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore implemented entry screening activities to all incoming travellers from the affected area in their transport hubs such as airports and train stations.

The Chair noted that the airport of Wuhan has direct flight connections with some EU countries (France, the UK and Italy) and concerned Member States will be asked to update on their measures later in the call.

On the 9th of January, the ECDC published a Threat Assessment Brief. At the time, the risk for travellers was considered low, the likelihood of introduction to the EU was considered to be low and the risk of further spread within the EU should a case be identified was considered low to very low.

The Chair invited ECDC to present a summary of the Rapid Risk Assessment

ECDC highlighted that the rapid risk assessment had changed since last week given that there is now more information concerning reported cases outside of China. There remains a lack of information on the transmission mode and the source of infection, but there is an indication of person-to-person transmission. As a result, ECDC assesses the risk for travellers going to Wuhan and visiting live animal markets as moderate. Avoiding markets would reduce the risk to low. It was highlighted that with the arrival of the Chinese New Year, this may increase the likelihood of transmission given increased travel. The implementation of infection prevention control measures is recommended and would reduce the currently low risk to very low for nosocomial transmission. Regarding the risk of transmission in airplanes, ECDC referred to the RAGIDA guidelines and suggested that the SARS information should be considered. ECDC does not recommend any entry screening at points of entry but given the minimal number of flights from Wuhan into Europe, it could be possible to have a targeted approach to passengers on these flights. ECDC advises travellers to avoid the market in Wuhan, avoid contact with animals and to avoid contact with sick people. Should travellers feel unwell, ECDC advises that they seek medical attention and provide their travel history upon return. ECDC advises health care workers to keep up to date on the event and in terms of new information on the virus. Regarding transmission via substances of human origin, ECDC recommends a precautionary deferral from donation of blood, cells, and tissue donors for 21 days after possible exposure to a confirmed case or after returning from Wuhan, China.

The Chair thanked ECDC for their update and recalled that on the 9th of January 2020, DG SANTE opened an alert notification on the EWRS where most Member States have since been sharing information on response and communication measures. The Chair thanked the Member States for these updates and reminded of the use of the new incident management module, which was specifically developed to provide comprehensive information on response measures during evolving threats. The Chair then opened the discussion to Member States and asked for a recent update from the countries with direct flights to and from Wuhan, China.

The U.K. noted that the situation is being monitored by Public Health England. The risk is considered to be low and as per the update they provided on EWRS, they have briefed health care workers on the event, have provided online guidance and have published a press

statement and advice to travellers. There are three direct flights to the UK and Wuhan and, in line with recommendations, there is no screening in place in the U.K.

France noted that they too have direct flights to Wuhan, China. They highlighted that there has been an alert message sent to the medical services at the airports in France, along with travel advice, signs and information available for travellers at the airport. Given the flights are provided by Air France they have also initiated audio messages during the flights to Wuhan and France. In addition, alert messages have been sent to all health care workers, general practitioners and health facilities about the event. A review of all standard operating procedures for such kinds of situations has been processed and the situation continues to be monitored closely. France then asked if it would be possible for all the measures listed on EWSR so be assembled into one unique file for ease.

The Chair thanked the UK and FR for their updates and regarding France's request this is the point of the incident management page on EWRS. DG SANTE will assemble what has already been posted into this module but countries are asked to use this service going forward. The Chair then summarized the measures taken by IT given they also have three direct flights to Wuhan, China:

- The MoH published a communication with available information on its website and transmitted it to UNSMAF/SASN (peripheral offices of the MoH at ports and airports) and local health authorities to raise awareness.
- There are three direct flights/week from Wuhan to Rome FCO, therefore a procedure was defined to check the presence of suspected cases on board, and their transfer to the National Infectious Disease Hospital (INMI Lazzaro Spallanzani), Rome.
- No restrictions on travel or trade regarding China are applied, according to WHO advice.
- The MoH is monitoring the situation and will update the epidemiological information whenever relevant.
- A travel advice (in Italian and English) was drafted for travellers going/returning from Wuhan to be shown in airports.

The Chair asked for the WHO to share their input in writing. Following this, the Chair, noted that DG SANTE would update EWRS accordingly and asked for countries to use the new module incident management on EWRS going forward to record measures taken. It was noted that in the advent or sustained human-to-human transmission or an increase in the number of cases, the HSC would be convened again.

2. AOB

DG RTD noted that they are in close contact with WHO R&D Blueprint and GloPID-R, both funders in research of epidemics. DG RTD then asked Member States if any research initiatives related to this virus had been launched or were planned to be launched.

Member States had no updates to provide DG RTD.

SANTE thanked participants and closed the meeting.