

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Wednesday 27/04/2022 at 16:15

1. Ukraine – current health challenges and EU action

Commissioner Kyriakides updated the participants on the health situation and challenges in Ukraine. She reiterated the Commission's commitment to provide support to refugees and Member States, and informed that over 200 patients have been successfully transferred so far – including oncological, wounded and patients with mental disorders.

ECDC also provided the latest epidemiological information, based on regular meetings held with the frontline Member States. The overall assessment is that the influx of people is stable, with small proportions returning to Ukraine. Registered refugees are actively entering the employment and education systems, and no major infectious disease outbreaks were reported. Countries underlined that they are focusing on ensuring continuity of healthcare. Preliminary results from a survey circulated amongst EU and EEA countries pointed to vaccination, continuity of treatment and surveillance – in particular for polio – as the main challenges faced by countries. ECDC continues to produce technical guidance for Member States, translating the material in Ukrainian and local languages ([link](#)). Furthermore, ECDC is developing with Poland a practical checklist for health inspectors in refugees' accommodation facilities, with WHO and the European Association for the Study of the Liver on a Joint Statement on Hepatitis A, B and C prevention and control for displaced people from Ukraine. ECDC in collaboration with DG ECHO is also providing support to Poland for the establishment of a medical hub.

Participants from frontline Member States experiencing large inflows of refugees updated on the situation in their country. On infectious diseases, Poland shared concerns over refugees living with HIV. Romania informed that they will launch, with the support of WHO, a study providing behavioural insights on refugees' health service needs, perceptions and barriers to access. The Romanian member of the platform encouraged refugee recipient states to join this initiative.

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

Commissioner Kyriakides informed the participants on the adoption of the EC Communication COVID-19 – Sustaining Preparedness and Response: Looking ahead. This Communication proposes a set of actions to manage the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the next one and was also informed by discussions of the EU Scientific Advice Platform on COVID-19 ([link](#)). Professor Piot informed the Platform about a growing trend in COVID-19 cases in South Africa, stressing that the situation is being closely monitored. On this point, ECDC shared that a limited but increasing proportion of

cases in South Africa is attributable to the Omicron sub-lineages BA4 and BA5, with few cases of these variants detected in Europe so far.

ECDC updated on the current epidemiological situation in EU/EEA, with notification rates remaining high in spite of downward trends in almost all EU countries, including in the population group above 65 years in the majority of EU countries. Mortality is overall decreasing. Data availability and quality is becoming increasingly limited, affecting reliability of forecasting and the ability of ECDC and EMA to provide recommendations on booster campaigns. No major changes in vaccination uptake were observed.

On China, ECDC informed that cases are increasing in the country, with most of the cases occurring in Shanghai. There are temporary effects of the lockdown leading to a decrease in the city, but mortality trends are going upward, mainly amongst the elderly. Professor Piot informed that discussions are ongoing over a possible total lockdown in Beijing.

In the field of vaccines, EMA informed about the imminent authorisation of the use of Comirnaty (Pfizer/ BioNTech) as a heterologous booster dose for adults 3 months after the completion of the primary series. The approval of a booster dose with Spikevax (Moderna) in 12 to 18 year old adolescents is expected for next month, and EMA is currently reviewing immune-bridging data on vaccine candidates of Sanofi-Pasteur and Valneva. EMA is continuing dialogues with manufacturers on updated version of their vaccines. Recommendations from WHO over the preferred composition for upcoming vaccination campaigns are expected over summer, and EMA will coordinate. On therapeutics, EMA is working with ECDC, WHO Europe and existing cohorts in different European countries to gather additional evidence for a threshold of clinical efficacy of neutralising monoclonal antibodies, especially as new sub variants continue to emerge. EMA also provided up-dates on the progress regarding the approval of Molnupiravir and on the efficacy of Xevudy against Omicron and sub-lineages.

Participants exchanged on national approaches regarding surveillance and public health measures, as well on the administration of a fourth vaccine dose. It was proposed to promote investigator-initiated clinical trials for vaccines, and the importance of inclusiveness and diversity in such trials was stressed. Experts also discussed the importance of gathering independent data on the extent to which a heterologous, fourth dose with an inactivated vaccine could boost cellular immune response.

3. AOBs, conclusions and suggestions for future agenda points

On hepatitis, ECDC informed that 111 cases had been reported in the UK and 40 cases in 11 Member States with the aetiology remaining unclear. The publication of a rapid risk assessment by ECDC was announced for Thursday 28 [\[link\]](#) . Participants updated on the epidemiological situation and on national approaches to surveillance. Member States were asked to send all available information to HERA and ECDC.

The next meeting is scheduled on 17 May at 1500 hours.

Participation

Member States participants:

1. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
2. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
3. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
4. Professor Toivo MAIMETS (Estonia)
5. Dr Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
6. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
7. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
8. Professor Diana PAUN (Romania)
9. Professor Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)
10. Professor Fernando Simón (Spain)

European Commission:

11. Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
12. Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
13. John F. Ryan, Acting Deputy Director General, DG SANTE
14. Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
15. Maria Luisa Llano Cardenal, Cabinet Expert, Vice-President Schinas
16. Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
17. Panayiotis Pourgourides, Cabinet Expert, Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
18. Daphne Von Buxhoeveden, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
19. Tove Ernst, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
20. Emilios Emiliou, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
21. Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
22. Sigrid Weiland, Policy Officer, Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE
23. Wolfgang Philipp, Acting Director, HERA
24. Clement Williamson, Policy Assistant to the Director General, HERA
25. Georgios Pepios, Trainee – Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
26. Sara Bertucci, Trainee – Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides

ECDC:

27. Karl Ekdahl, Head of Disease Programmes
28. Antonis Lanaras, Head of Section European and International Cooperation

EMA:

29. Marco Cavaleri, Head of the office Anti-infectives and Vaccines
30. Zigmar Sebris, Strategic Support and Crisis Coordination Officer