

## **European Commission's advisory panel on COVID-19**

### **Report – audioconference Thursday 8/10/2020 at 17:00**

The President confirmed the situation is worsening across the EU as the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise. She outlined the work done by the European Commission since July, notably: the publication of a Communication on COVID-19 outbreaks preparedness, the negotiations to conclude COVID-19 vaccines contracts while supporting the global efforts in this area and the proposal to coordinate the travel recommendations and internal borders. The President confirmed the Health Union package in early November focused on the EU framework for health threats preparedness response and the strengthening of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Later in November, the Pharmaceutical Strategy will also tackle key structural issues linked to the resilience of the EU.

The discussion focused on the two agenda points:

#### **1. State of play and outlook**

The Panel confirmed that the situation is worsening in all Member States. Important differences remain between Member States apparently implementing the same measures which is an issue to look at carefully.

The Panel agreed on the need for further harmonisation and coordination (on testing, on borders and travel, etc.). It is essential that there are clear and coherent messages to citizens on the situation and on the measures to take. The summer relaxation has led to many questioning the measures taken and the necessity of respecting them.

The Panel cautioned on the importance of communication to citizens. The situation has changed compared to spring: there is a clear expectation to handle new outbreaks better and faster. This leads to increased scrutiny on messaging and also makes the prospect of several months of restrictions less understandable. The important issue of mental health was raised and the need to tackle it via specific actions.

The experts agreed on the need to look at collective behavioural changes and the role of communication campaigns. Clear and factual communication will lead to higher individual responsibility and compliance with measures. The possibility of carrying out an EU-wide study on people's attitudes towards the pandemic and the measures was mentioned as a potentially useful tool to better design communication and measures.

The slow development of new diagnostic tools was raised as an issue of concern. Rapid tests must be developed and put in the market to complement (not replace) PCR tests. It is however essential that there is a centralised process of approval and evaluation so that these new tests can be useful and trusted.

The President confirmed the issue of rapid tests is being discussed with Member States in the context of the Health Security Committee.

## 2. Vaccination strategy for Europe

The Panel welcomed the blueprint for COVID-19 vaccination that was previously discussed and agreed by the Health Security Committee. When turning it into a Commission Communication, it is important to stress that any vaccination framework would require frequent updates to reflect the vaccines available and the epidemiological situation. Similarly, the Panel recommended that it is made clear that different vaccines will have different effects (decreasing severity or decreasing transmission) and this would require different prioritisation strategies.

The Panel agreed on the importance of vaccines and welcome the progress made by the EU in securing Advance Purchase Agreements. It stressed that vaccines must be seen as one element among others to curve the pandemic: they will not eradicate the virus. The Panel stressed the need to carefully monitor the safety and long-term effects of any vaccine (real world monitoring) and advised to develop a robust modelling system. It suggested that the Commission support a European vaccine clinical trials network, for both a phase 3 and Phase 4 studies, in particular to carefully assess long-term safety and efficacy.

The Panel confirmed that communicating clearly to citizens on the benefits and relative risks of COVID-19 vaccines was essential. It is crucial that there is transparency and trust.

Commissioner Kyriakides thanked the Panel for their contribution and the discussion. She confirmed safety and efficacy are the key driving principles and stressed that work was on-going to establish a robust monitoring system, together with the ECDC and EMA, from the first day.

### Participants in the audioconference:

- European Commission: President von der Leyen, Commissioner Kyriakides, K. Vanderberghe, R. Reig Rodrigo, G. Rossides, S. Gallina
- Peter Piot (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)
- Arnaud Fontenot (Institut Pasteur)
- Lothar Wieler (Robert Koch Institute)
- Maria Capobianchi (National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Rome)
- Marion Koopman (Erasmus MC)

### Observers:

- Andrea Ammon (ECDC Director)

### Excused:

- Christian Drosten (Charité)
- Kåre Mølbak (Statens Serum Institute)