



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Public health
Health Security

General Working Group of the Health Security Committee Meeting

Wednesday 19 June 2024 - 10:30-12:30

Flash Report

1. Ad-hoc COVID-19 epidemiological update

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) reported evidence of increased SARS-CoV-2 activity for some reporting EU/EEA countries, with increased activity in both primary and secondary care. The increases are observed in test positivity, driven primarily by increases in the age group of 65 years and above. The increases in positive test cases currently have very limited impact on severity indicators, such as on hospitalisations, ICU admissions or deaths. A family of Omicron subtypes (JN.1 variants, also referred to as (“FLiRT”) variants) are currently under monitoring and increasingly dominant in some EU/EEA countries. However, these are unlikely to be associated with any increase in infection severity, or a reduction in vaccine effectiveness against severe disease. Current increases might be attributable to increased social contacts during spring/summer, and to waning immunity due to longer time periods since last vaccination.

2. Meeting Objectives

DG SANTE gave an overview on the objectives for this meeting dedicated to discussing climate change. During previous Senior-level Health Security Committee meetings, the topic of climate change and its impact on health had already been addressed, specifically under the context of the revised EU Health Security Framework. DG SANTE explained that the Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 on serious cross-border threats to health applies to public health measures in relation to several categories, one of which includes threats of environmental origin, including those due to climate. Therefore, the objective of the meeting was to identify topics that are relevant for the work of the Health Security Committee.

3. Decision-support tools to build climate resilience against emerging infectious diseases in Europe and beyond – Heidelberg Institute of Global Health & Interdisciplinary Centre for Scientific Computing and Umeå University

The Infectious Disease decision-support tools and alert system (IDAlert) project was presented by its Principal Investigator. The objective of the project is to tackle the emergence and transmission of pathogens with climate change by developing a range of decision-support tools and systems to enable decision-makers to act on time with improved responses. The project proposes a framework for the co-production of policy-relevant indicators and decision support tools that track past, present, and future climate induced disease risks across hazard, exposure, and vulnerability domains at the animal, human, and environmental interface, adopting a One Health approach. The project is aiming to implement an innovative co-creation, participatory, and citizen science approach for surveillance, including a MosquitoAlert App, citizen tick reports, and acoustic recognition of animals for monitoring.

4. Strategic discussion on the prioritization of topics of climate health impacts

DG SANTE gave an overview of the European Commission's work on climate and health policies. Among these, there is ongoing work on the mitigation of health systems' contribution to climate change. The EU Expert Group on Health System Performance Assessment has identified the environmental impact of healthcare as an area of future work. EU funding is already available under the Recovery and Resilience Facility to improve energy efficiency of hospitals, primary care, and community care facilities. Furthermore, there is an EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change which established the European Climate and Health Observatory to better understand, anticipate, and minimise the health threats caused by climate change. In the international agenda, the EU endorsed the Budapest Declaration and the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28) declaration on climate and health.

DG SANTE presented the results of a survey that was shared with EU/EEA countries in preparation for the meeting to discuss prioritization activities of the GWG HSC. Vector-borne diseases, heatwaves and extreme heat and floods were among the topics related to climate change and its impact on health that should be prioritized for the work of the Health Security Committee. The results show that Members of the GWG HSC would welcome more information and discussion on the topics prioritised. Several GWG HSC members shared their views on the importance of continuing the discussion of climate change and its impact on health, especially considering the cross-border threat to health component. As follow-up to this discussion, DG SANTE will continue working with the GWG HSC to draft an HSC opinion and work on addressing the priorities addressed during the meeting.

5. Risk assessments for climate change and extreme weather events regarding health

The European Environment Agency (EEA) gave an overview on its recent and first ever [European Climate Risk Assessment \(EUCRA\)](#), which focuses in one section specifically on the climate risks that affect health. The assessment focuses on areas where urgent action is needed, such as heat stress, and the impact of wildfires. Furthermore, the European Climate and Health Observatory has published reports on [Responding to climate change impacts on human health in Europe: focus on floods, droughts and water quality](#). The EEA described water-related climate impacts on health which include fatalities, increase in infectious diseases, and impacts on mental health. The EEA highlighted the need for solutions across different levels and sectors to respond to the impact of climate change and health.

The ECDC presented its work on floods and heatwaves, as the frequency and intensity of both has increased and the trend is projected to continue resulting in several risks to health. The ECDC presented the risk pathways for flooding, including contamination of water supplies, and stagnant water serving as breeding site for mosquitos. Floods can also damage infrastructures that may affect the quality of drinking water; displace people and lead to hygiene issues; and disrupt medical services. ECDC highlighted that 11% of European hospitals are in flood prone areas. On heatwaves, ECDC explained that there is a positive significant association between heatwaves and a wide range of infectious diseases, including vector-borne, gastrointestinal, and respiratory infections. In its recent rapid risk assessments, ECDC highlighted several response measures, including enhanced surveillance, risk communication, healthcare worker and first responder awareness, and hospital preparedness.

6. AOB: Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2022/2371

ECDC reminded countries that have not confirmed the dates for the assessments taking place in 2025 to please confirm them so the preparatory work can begin.

7. AOB: Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 2022/2371

DG SANTE explained that the Implementing Act under Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 2022/2371, on the coordination of the Health Security Committee, has been commented on by the HSC and will be circulated among the members of the GWG HSC for further comments. The comments and Implementing Act will be further discussed during the next GWG HSC meeting on 3 July 2024.

8. AOB: Belgium presentation on an IPCR paper

Belgium presented a paper that clarifies the role of the integrated political crisis response (IPCR). The paper intends to present the IPCR as a horizontal crisis management mechanism and make it more well-known to other specific formations such as health. Belgium will share the paper with the Health Security Committee members to clarify the role of the IPCR, its activities, and to raise awareness of the work of the IPCR in general.