

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Wednesday 27/10/2021 at 18:00

Commissioner Kyriakides and Prof. Piot opened the meeting by emphasising the increase in incidence, but also hospitalisations, in several EU Member States.

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

ECDC updated on the situation. As of 17 October, six countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania) were categorised as of very high concern, seven countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia and Slovenia) as of high concern, ten countries (Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Poland) as of moderate concern, six countries (France, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) as of low concern and one country (Italy) as of very low concern..

Overall, in the EU, all indicators are now increasing, including ICU occupancy and deaths. The forecasts are that they will continue to increase. Full vaccination is at 63% of the total population, which is insufficient, if not accompanied by other measures, to control the currently circulating highly transmissible Delta variant.

ECDC is in contact with Member States experiencing a lower vaccination coverage to discuss the drivers for this low coverage and evaluate possible areas for support, tailored per country. From the ongoing discussions, low vaccination uptake among elderly and circulation in educational settings appear as a recurring issue. Commissioner Kyriakides informed about ongoing initiatives by the Commission to support countries and encouraged Member States to activate the Union Civil Protection Mechanism early on when they anticipate a need for assistance.

2. COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics

EMA informed on recent updates regarding vaccines. EMA issued a positive recommendation for a booster dose of Spikevax in adults over 18. This follows the authorisation of Comirnaty boosters a few weeks ago. EMA also received an application for an extension of Comirnaty to 5-11 years old, for which additional data will be submitted in November. Work is also ongoing on the approval of additional manufacturing sites as well as for a 'ready-to-use' formulation for Comirnaty and for the extension of the shelf life of Spikevax. Four other vaccines are currently under rolling review and discussions started with Valneva. EMA recalled that it terminated the rolling review of Curevac on 12 October as the company withdrew its application.

Nine therapeutics are currently under different stages of review, including four antivirals. A rolling review for Molunipiravir started on Monday 25 October. Three immunomodulators are under assessment for an extension of indication.

Pharmacovigilance activities are ongoing. In depth discussions are taking place in the context of several ongoing studies looking into the risk of myocarditis and pericarditis associated with mRNA vaccines. There appears to be an increased incidence in young males under 30. These remain however very rare events and the benefits of the vaccine largely exceed any possible risk. These very rare events are clearly identified and labelled, and guidance is provided for healthcare professionals to detect and manage such reactions.

National experts discussed the situation across Member States. Several countries reported recent steep increases in cases and in hospital admissions, including ICU admissions, starting around mid-October. Overall, the increases in hospitalisations observed in many countries appear to be driven primarily by admissions of vaccinated elderly individuals affected by breakthrough infections and unvaccinated younger adults. Some experts also expressed concerns regarding pockets of unvaccinated populations concentrated in specific areas, as well as a risk of high pressure on healthcare systems following the start of the seasonal influenza and in some instances an increase in paediatric admissions associated with RSV infections. Platform members also exchanged on national approaches towards lifting and/or reintroducing certain non-pharmaceutical interventions. A few participants informed about the rollout of boosters and the platform decided to have a more thorough exchange on the policy regarding third doses and boosters in the next meeting.

When closing the meeting, Commissioner Kyriakides stressed that the Commission is willing to support in any way possible. She also reiterated her call to Member States to make use of European solidarity and activate the Union Civil Protection Mechanism early if/when experiencing a need for support, be it in terms of equipment, therapeutics, medical teams or cross border transfers of patients.

3. AOB

The next meeting is scheduled on Wednesday 10/11 at 17:15 GMT+1

Participation

1. Professor Markus MUELLER (Austria)
2. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
3. Dr Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
4. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
5. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
6. Professor Helene Probst (Denmark)
7. Professor Arnaud FONTANET (France)
8. Professor Sotirios TSIODRAS (Greece)
9. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
10. Dr Eibhlin Connolly (Ireland)
11. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
12. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
13. Professor Aura TIMEN (The Netherlands)
14. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
15. Professor Henrique BARROS (Portugal)
16. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
17. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
18. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
19. Professor Fernando SIMÓN (Spain)
20. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

- Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
- Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
- Anna Carnegie, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
- Sandra Gallina, Director General, DG SANTE
- Pierre Delsaux, Deputy Director General, DG SANTE
- Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Chrystalla Papanastasiou-Constantinou, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Thomas Van Canghai, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
- Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
- Peter Wagner, Secretariat General
- Jeremy Bray, Secretariat General
- Nicolas Pradalie, Secretariat General

- Andrea Ammon, Director
- Helen Johnson, Expert Mathematical Modelling

EMA

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