

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Thursday 17/12/2020 at 15:30

1. COVID-19 vaccines - Epidemiological update by ECDC

ECDC updated participants on the [epidemiological situation](#). Reductions in case notification rates are slowing down and seem to be stabilising at a very high level (375/100,000 population as EU average, including 12 countries with rates over 500/100,000). Other indicators such as test positivity, new hospital/ICU admissions and death rate also remain stable, but absolute values of these indicators remain high. ECDC also recalled the importance of accounting for lag time between changes in case notification and observed changes in death notification.

Overall, there are no signs that public health measures can be lifted. On the contrary, maintaining them over the upcoming holiday period can contribute to avoiding a new surge in cases in January.

2. COVID-19 vaccination – State of play by EMA

EMA provided an update on the marketing authorisation process of different vaccine candidates. The evaluations of the applications for a conditional marketing authorisation from BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna are progressing.

Pending final discussions in the CHMP scientific committee, EMA plans to issue an opinion on BioNTech/Pfizer on Monday 21 December. The opinion will include a risk management plan to ensure that vaccines are monitored closely throughout their roll out. Pharmacovigilance requirements are also enhanced and additional independent safety monitoring is put in place for COVID-19 vaccines.

EMA received additional data from Moderna and aims to conclude its scientific assessment of this vaccine in an extraordinary meeting on 6 January 2021.

In addition, two rolling reviews are ongoing, for the Astra Zeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccine candidates.

3. COVID-19 vaccination - Strategic communication plan on vaccines and vaccination

The Commission presented its work in the field of communication on COVID-19 vaccination. The Commission is conducting a survey on the attitudes towards vaccination across the EU. The results, expected in the coming weeks, *will be shared with the members of the platform*. It will help understand the drivers of vaccine confidence and the root causes of vaccine hesitancy.

The Commission developed a [toolbox](#) of communication products available to public authorities, healthcare associations and interested stakeholders throughout Europe.

Communication material is available in all EU languages, and can be further customised to national audiences and adapted to the specificities of each country. This can contribute to consistency and coherence in communication across countries. Experts emphasised the importance of operating through national and local agencies, to avoid running parallel campaigns at European and national/local level. In this respect, platform members supported the idea of bringing together persons in charge of communication on vaccination from all Member States.

Communication material will be launched according to phases in the rollout of vaccines, from communication on the approval process, to messages targeted to priority groups and finally broader communication to the general public. Platform members discussed the importance of tailoring the content, medium and format of the messages to specific audiences as well as to specific vaccines. Several participants pointed out the central role of healthcare workers who can relay information and act as trusted messengers.

Disinformation is an important element stressed by the platform. It further highlights the need for clear, transparent and accurate information, for instance to explain the accelerated vaccine development and authorisation process.

4. COVID-19 vaccination - Update on national plans

EU Vaccination Days on 27-29 December will mark the launch of COVID-19 vaccination campaigns throughout Europe. Participants exchanged about their plans and organisation for the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, and flagged the importance of having timely information on vaccine delivery schedules for planning purposes.

Experts briefly exchanged on the topic of ‘vaccination certificates’ and ‘proof of vaccination’. Agreement on a common approach would need to be developed timely and should be aligned with work conducted at global level under the coordination of WHO. The International Health Regulations (IHR) provide a framework and specific tools such as the [International Certificate of Vaccination](#). While digital solutions can be facilitated, the approach should not depart significantly from current widely accepted practice (e.g. used for yellow fever). A ‘vaccination certificate’ should not become a ‘hidden’ obligation to vaccinate.

5. Conclusions and suggestions for future agenda points

Commissioner Kyriakides thanked all platform participants, ECDC and EMA.

The next meeting will take place on 7 January 2021 at 17:00.

Topics will cover an epidemiological update of the situation, an update on vaccines authorisations by EMA, an early exchange of experience on the rollout of vaccination campaigns, and a discussion on vaccination certificates.

Extraordinary meetings may be called before in case of need in the coming weeks.

Participation

Platform participants:

1. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
2. Dr. Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
3. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
4. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
5. Dr Roman CHLIBEK, Marika MADAROVA (Czechia)
6. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
7. Professor Taneli PUUMALAINEN (Finland)
8. Professor Arnaud FONTANET (France)
9. Dr. Hans-Ulrich HOLTHERM (Germany)
10. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
11. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
12. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
13. Professor Edita FYI SUZIEDELIENE (Lithuania)
14. Dr Jean- Claude SCHMIT (Luxembourg)
15. Dr Charles MALLIA AZZOPARDI (Malta)
16. Dr Aura TIMEN (The Netherlands)
17. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
18. Professor Henrique DE BARROS (Portugal)
19. Mrs Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
20. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
21. Mr. Milan KREK (Slovenia)
22. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

- Commissioner Stella KYRIAKIDES (Chair)
- Prof. Peter PIOT, Special Advisor to the President of the European Commission
- Director General Sandra GALLINA, DG SANTE
- Deputy Director General Pierre DELSAUX, DG SANTE
- Giorgos ROSSIDES, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Roberto REIG RODRIGO, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Tove ERNST, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Nicolas PRADALIE, Secretariat General
- Jeremy BRAY, Secretariat General
- Thomas VAN CANGH, Policy Assistant to Director General Gallina
- Sigrid WEILAND, DG RTD

ECDC

- Dr Andrea AMMON, Director

- Dr Lucia PASTORE CELENTANO, Head of Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme

EMA

- Emer COOKE, Executive Director