

European Commission's advisory panel on COVID-19

Report – videoconference Friday 21/01/2022 at 18:00

The President confirmed that more than 70% of the total population in the EU has been vaccinated and 38% has so far received a booster. The President asked whether there is any evidence on the effectiveness of boosters waning or if a fourth dose might be needed in the coming months.

The Panel explained how Omicron is progressing in different Member States. There was agreement on the very positive effect of vaccination and boosters in protecting against severe outcomes. However, booster shots should be sufficiently spaced out to optimise immune response.

The Panel agreed that there is uncertainty regarding how the epidemiological situation might evolve if Omicron eventually wanes. The possibility of the Delta variant becoming dominant again was mentioned but so was the prospect of new variants.

Amid such uncertainty, the development of new vaccines should ideally focus on: 1) A multivalent vaccine (Omicron + other variants), 2) Vaccines that provide increased protection against infection, 3) Vaccines that protect against all variants.

The experts explained that surveillance might need to be adapted in due course for the new phase of the pandemic, particularly shifting towards syndromic surveillance at the appropriate moment. Further discussion would be needed regarding the transition to this new phase where the nature of outbreaks might change, and strong EU level coordination will be essential at that stage.

The President concluded the meeting by recalling that more than 1.2bn doses have been delivered in the EU and 1.6bn doses have been exported or donated. The vaccine production capacity in the EU is now around 300m doses per month.

Participants in the videoconference:

- European Commission: President von der Leyen, Commissioner Kyriakides, K. Vandenberghe, R. Reig Rodrigo, P. Delsaux, S. Gallina, E. Werner
- Andrea Ammon (ECDC)
- Emer Cooke, Marco Cavaleri (EMA)
- Prof Peter Piot (London School of Tropical Medicine)
- Prof Arnaud Fontanet (Institut Pasteur)
- Prof Maria-Rosaria Capobianchi (National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Rome)
- Dr. Miklós Szócska (Director of The Health Services Management Training Centre of the Semmelweis University)
- Prof Marion Koopmans (Erasmus MC)
- Dr. Fernando Simon (Coordination Centre for Health Alerts and Emergencies, Spain)
- Prof Lothar Wieler (Robert Koch Institute)

Excused:

- Prof Christian Drosten (Charité)
- Prof Kåre Mølbak (Statens Serum Institute, Copenhagen)