

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

### **Report – videoconference Wednesday 10/02/2021 at 18:00**

The President outline the state of play of work at EU level and the forthcoming Communication focused on vaccines and variants.

#### **1. SARS-CoV-2 variants**

The Panel discussed the different variants and their spread in the EU. It was noted that the presence of the “UK” variant is quickly increasing. The focus on mortality and morbidity indicators should be maintained.

The experts agreed on the importance of genome sequencing to detect variants. They stressed the need to also collect biological, clinical and epidemiological data and to analyse this data to better understand the development of these variants.

Eventually, a system of detection and assessment similar to the one already in use for influenza might be needed. This allows carrying out strain analysis leading to recommendations for vaccine manufacturing. Similarly, multivalent vaccines should be eventually considered.

The Panel considered reaching 5% of sequencing quite challenging due to capacity constraints. The already substantial pressure in the system was underlined. It is important to avoid creating new structures that could deviate resources. For example, the focus on a one-health approach was raised as essential but potentially challenging.

They referred to new PCR “multiplex” tests that also allow detecting the new variants. The need to share data at global level was confirmed as key to advance our understanding of the virus and its variants. The experts stressed the importance of big data, data access and data sharing.

The need to organise and coordinate clinical trials at EU level was highlighted as a key issue for the short and medium-term. In addition, while coordination on scientific efforts was deemed important, it was stressed that it is essential to avoid biases and therefore independent/parallel research is also necessary.

The Panel agreed on the importance of ensuring industrial capacity and confirmed that a differentiated approach was needed based on vaccine technology. This is essential to ensure wide and rapid vaccination leading to lower risk of mutant escape. In addition, regulatory preparedness is needed to ensure fast approvals and variations.

The experts stressed the importance of continuing research on whether there is a difference in protection between natural immunity and vaccine induced one.

**Participants in the audioconference:**

- European Commission: President von der Leyen, K. Vanderberghe, J. Bray, G. Rossides, D. von Buxhoeveden, R. Reig Rodrigo, P. Wagner, S. Gallina, P. Delsaux
- Peter Piot (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)
- Christian Drosten (Charité)
- Arnaud Fontenet (Institut Pasteur)
- Maria Capobianchi (National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Rome)
- Kåre Mølbak (Statens Serum Institute)
- Lars Schaade (Robert Koch Institute)
- Fernando Simon (Coordination Centre for Health Alerts and Emergencies, Spain)
- Miklos Szocska (Director of The Health Services Management Training Centre of the Semmelweis University)

**Observers:**

- Andrea Ammon (ECDC Director)

**Excused:**

- Marion Koopmans (Erasmus MC)
- Lothar Wieler (Robert Koch Institute)