

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Wednesday 05/01/2022 at 16:00

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

The ECDC updated on the current situation. The overall epidemiological situation in the EU/EEA is characterised by a high case notification rate and a stabilizing death rate. Additional data from the last two weeks are expected to provide a more reliable outlook of the current situation. Comparisons with the United Kingdom indicate that omicron is on the path to becoming the dominant variant throughout the EU. A definitive conclusion on severity is still pending. In light of this situation, the ECDC emphasized the critical importance to reintroduce or maintain non-pharmaceutical interventions and accelerate vaccination, including the roll out of boosters. The agency indicated that as of January 5th, less than 70% of the total European population had completed primary vaccination series and less than 30% had received a booster dose.

Based on existing data and omicron's foreseen pressure on health systems and society, the ECDC suggested considering a more pragmatic approach for quarantine and isolation requirements in high and extreme burden settings. Adaptations proposed included options to reduce quarantine and isolation period, encourage the wearing of high efficiency masks and repeat RADT and RT-PCR testing to shorten quarantine and isolation.

Experts exchanged on the situation in their country, notably regarding the omicron variant. Several participants reported unprecedented explosion of cases and expected a further deterioration of the situation in the coming days. Experts remained concerned about the uncertainty linked to omicron's impact on intensive care units. Most experts emphasized omicron's pressure on health systems' capacity and anticipated further disruption in the coming weeks. Some representatives were worried that insufficient booster coverage could undermine health systems' resilience to the upcoming wave. Experts also exchanged on the recent updates regarding quarantine and isolation requirements in their country. The Italian representative informed about Italy's intention to extend compulsory vaccination to people aged over 50. The need to consider adapting surveillance strategies was mentioned.

Prof Piot stressed that with omicron, the pandemic has entered a new phase. He called for greater harmonization of quarantine and isolation measures.

In her conclusion, Commissioner Kyriakides emphasised the need to increase vaccination and booster coverage as well as the predictability of measures. She expressed confidence that the French Presidency of the Council of the EU will foster coordination between member states.

2. COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics

EMA reported that vaccines continued to offer important protection against severe diseases and decent protection against symptomatic infections. It also stressed that boosters increased protection against hospitalizations. EMA indicated that evidence supporting a shift to variant adapted vaccines remained unclear. However, the agency confirmed its interests to follow closely research on multi-variant vaccines. Prof Piot acknowledged the need to invest in a new generation of vaccines and proposed that HERA could support their development.

EMA also updated participants about ongoing work on a statement regarding the effectiveness of mRNA vaccines in pregnant women and the preparation of a lines-to-take document on the safety and efficacy of vaccines for children below sixteen years old in light of the good results so far. In addition, EMA is assessing safety data for booster doses for children. This procedure is foreseen to be finalised by the end of January.

The agency also informed participants that it is working in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health (UK) and the Food and Drug Administration (US) to collect observational data to assess monoclonal antibodies' efficacy against variants.

3. AOB

The next meeting is scheduled on Wednesday 19 January 2022 at 16:00.

Participation

Member States participants:

1. Professor Markus MÜLLER (Austria)
2. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
3. Professor Angel Kunchev (Bulgaria)
4. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
5. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
6. Professor Helene PROBST (Denmark)
7. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
8. Professor Arnaud FONTANET (FRANCE)
9. Dr Christophe Bayer (Germany)
10. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
11. Dr Darina O'FLANAGAN (Ireland)
12. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
13. Jean-Claude SCHMIT (Luxembourg)
14. Charles MALLIA-AZZOPARDI (Malta)
15. Professor Henrique Barros (Portugal)
16. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
17. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
18. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
19. Dr Fernando SIMÓN (Spain)
20. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

21. Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
22. Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
23. Anna Carnegie, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
24. Sandra Gallina, Director General, DG SANTE
25. Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
26. Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
27. Antoine Corporandy, Trainee – Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
28. Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
29. Peter Wagner, Secretariat General
30. Nicolas Pradalie, Secretariat General

ECDC

31. Andrea Ammon, Director

32. Agoritsa Baka, Principal Expert for Emergency Preparedness and Response

EMA

33. Emer Cooke, Executive Director

34. Marco Cavaleri, Head of the office Anti-infectives and Vaccines