

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Tuesday 18/10/2022 at 16:00

Commissioner Kyriakides and Prof. Piot debriefed participants from a recent mission to the US where they held fruitful exchanges on topics of common interest covering health security issues - such as COVID-19 - and cancer.

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological situation and update on vaccines and therapeutics

ECDC updated on the latest **COVID-19 situation**, with an increase observed in all indicators, including deaths in one third of the EU/EEA countries. Increased COVID-19 transmission and mortality have also been observed among residents of long-term care facilities. The vaccination uptake for the second booster dose remains at suboptimal levels in the target groups in many EU/EEA countries.

No significant changes in the distribution of variants have been reported. The vast majority of sequenced samples continue to be the BA.4/5 strain. ECDC classified the BQ variant as a variant under monitoring, together with a series of Omicron-derived sub-variants. Their current prevalence does not have an impact on the epidemiological situation. These new variants under monitoring appear unlikely to be associated with an increase in severity or intrinsic transmissibility, though they may have a transmission advantage through their antigenic specificities.

Regarding influenza and RSV, the activity is at baseline rates and does not appear to be significantly picking up so far. ECDC monitors closely the evolution of the situation.

Member States experts reported on the epidemiological situation in their country regarding COVID-19 and respiratory infections, as well as on the COVID-19 booster vaccination uptake. Experts also exchanged on post-covid conditions ('long covid'), which will be further discussed at the face-to-face meeting of the Scientific Platform planned at the end of November.

EMA provided an update on COVID-19 vaccines authorisations. By now, adapted vaccines have been authorised for boosting of individuals over 12 years of age. Younger age groups (down to 6 months) are eligible for original vaccines. Two vaccine candidates are still under rolling review, one by Sanofi Pasteur and one by HIPRA.

Regarding therapeutics, the efficacy of monoclonal antibodies is a concern in the light of emerging variants. EMA is working on consolidated information on their effectiveness against different strains.

2. AOB

Experts also touched upon the situation regarding monkeypox, where a constant reduction in cases in the EU has been observed since August. As risks and uncertainties remain, circulation may continue, though possibly at very low levels. The low number of cases constitutes however a challenge for the completion of clinical trials.

Regarding the Ebola outbreak in Uganda, ECDC provided an epidemiological update and informed about ongoing contacts with DG ECHO to deploy two field epidemiologists to Uganda the following week. Member States experts exchanged on planned measures at national level, both in terms of hospital and public health preparedness. EMA recalled that there is currently no authorised therapeutic against the Ebola Disease caused by the Sudan virus involved in the current outbreak in Uganda. The two EU-authorised vaccines are based on the Zaire virus too. Work is ongoing with WHO on other possible vaccine candidates.

Commissioner Kyriakides informed the participants about the planned physical meeting of the scientific platform to be held in Brussels on 29 November, and invited participants to submit suggestions for agenda items.

Participation

Member States participants:

1. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
2. Professor Alemka MARKOTIĆ (Croatia)
3. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
4. Professor Toivo MAIMETS (Estonia)
5. Mr Taneli PUUMALAINEN (Finland)
6. Professor Miklós SZÓCSKA (Hungary)
7. Professor Breda SMYTH (Ireland)
8. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
9. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
10. Professor Henrique BARROS (Portugal)
11. Professor Diana PAUN (Romania)
12. Dr Mario FAFANGEL (Slovenia)
13. Professor Fernando SIMÓN (SPAIN)
14. Professor Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

15. Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
16. Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
17. Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
18. John F. Ryan, Acting Director General, DG SANTE
19. Daphne Von Buxhoeveden, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
20. Ralf Kuhne, Policy Assistant, Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
21. Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
22. Thomas Van Cangh, Acting Head of Unit, Policy Strategy Unit, DG SANTE
23. Marta Valenciano, Intelligence Analyst - Lead Epidemiologist, Policy Strategy Unit, DG SANTE
24. Sigrid Weiland, Policy Officer – Policy Strategy Unit, DG SANTE
25. Wolfgang Philipp – Acting Director, HERA
26. Anne Auffret, Policy Assistant to Director General, HERA
27. Hannah Herzig, HERA
28. Ornella Martinello, Secretariat General

ECDC:

29. Andrea Ammon, Director

EMA:

30. Emer Cooke – Executive Director