



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Public health  
**Health Security**

Luxembourg, 30 November 2021

## **Health Security Committee - EU/EEA countries ONLY**

### **Audio meeting on the outbreak of COVID-19**

#### **Draft Summary Report**

**Chair:** Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission, DG SANTE C3

**Audio participants:** AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, SI, NO, IS, DG SANTE, DG MOVE, DG ECHO, DR HR, SG, HERA, COUNCIL, EMA, ECDC, WHO

#### **Agenda points:**

1. Latest updates on the Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant
2. Discussion on measures taken by Member States

#### **Key messages:**

##### **1. Latest update on the Omicron variant**

Following the discussions concerning the Omicron variant on Friday 26 November 2021, an update on the Omicron variant was provided by EMA and ECDC.

**EMA** reported that there is no concrete information yet about the effectiveness of the vaccines with respect to the new variant. Studies are initiated by various laboratories and vaccine companies. EMA stressed that regardless of whether there is a possibility that the vaccine composition might need to be changed, more evidence on this new variant needs to be gathered first and the next two weeks would be critical in this respect. EMA is in constant contact with WHO and the vaccine manufacturers.

The **ECDC** highlighted that so far, based on available information, 48 confirmed COVID-19 cases due to the variant “Omicron” have been detected in Europe as of 30 November. So far, there are no reported severe cases or death. Further information is needed, in particular from southern Africa counties, where sequencing is, however, very low. The Omicron variant is likely to be associated with high transmissibility and with significant immune escape. The first virological investigation results are expected in two weeks, so again the next two weeks would be crucial in gathering important information about this new variant. The WHO Technical advisory group on virus evolution convenes daily and ECDC participates. ECDC recommends the following **measures for incoming travellers**: requirement of **proof of negative RT-PCR test** ideally pre-departure and when possible upon arrival, and **quarantine for a minimum of seven days** and ideally for fourteen days with a negative test before release. Proof of vaccination should not exempt from testing and quarantine.

## **2. Situation update from countries and discussion**

Member States reported confirmed or suspected cases of Omicron and gave a short situation update on their current situation. Member states reported that the cases were mostly related to incoming travellers from South Africa, mainly mild cases have been reported, and most patients had been fully vaccinated (IT also mentioned a positive case from a patient who already received the booster dose).

All Member States introduced a ban for travellers from several African countries.

**PT** mentioned a small outbreak among a football team with 13 suspected cases, where the index case travelled to South Africa. The vast majority of these cases have no symptoms or mild symptoms. PT has imposed a travel ban to south African countries as well as a negative PCR test requirement even for EU citizens.

**ES** mentioned that more time is needed to understand the impact of the new variant and expressed concern about its possible implications. There may be indications that the variant has at least been circulating since October 2021. ES understands that further measures should be implemented to prevent spread in Europe. However, it is difficult to implement strict measures, while the variant is not a big threat in Europe yet.

**CZ** mentioned a confirmed case and has introduced stricter measures for incoming travellers.

**SE** mentioned two confirmed cases who travelled from South Africa. SE introduced stricter measures for incoming travellers.

**AT** mentioned that the cases detected were tested negative before departure, but tested positive upon arrival (both fully vaccinated).

**BE** mentioned a case from a traveller who arrived from Egypt through Turkey. Several Member States mentioned mandatory quarantine/isolation for suspected/confirmed Omicron cases, ranging from 12 days to 10 days, with the possibility for cutting this period short if there is a negative PCR test around day 5 or 6.

**DK** reported two confirmed cases, with travel history to S. Africa, who have been promptly isolated. DK has imposed travel restrictions to south African countries, including Angola, Malawi and Zambia. DK applies quarantine of 10 days, which can be reduced to 6 days.

**DE** mentioned four cases (fully vaccinated, mild symptoms), the travellers arrived from Cape Town, South Africa. Additional three cases are not confirmed yet. DE has implemented stricter measures; quarantine for 14 days for incoming travellers from areas of the variant and for confirmed cases. DE also reported having recommended special measures at major airports, such as separation rooms for suspected cases.

**FR** mentioned 12 possible cases in France and a case in the Reunion Islands with a travel history in South Africa.

**PT** and **IE** called for stronger efforts on testing, including mandatory testing for incoming EU citizens, regardless of vaccination status (currently exempt if in possession of an EU DCC for vaccination or recovery), stressing the urgent need to reinforce measures within the next two weeks, in order to gather as much information as possible and detect all possible imported cases.

**IE** noted that if a country wants to be extra cautious, other countries should not prevent them to do so.

**NO** referred to the issue raised by Portugal, perhaps it would be useful if the commission could provide additional information on the interpretation of art 11.2. of the EUDCC regulation.

The **COM** replied that it will rapidly liaise with the relevant Commission services and come back to this point.

**SI** mentioned that there are no direct flights from southern African countries, and that travellers come to SI through transit hubs, thus asking about measures regarding travel hubs. **ECDC** mentioned that the EU has several transit hubs that are important points for testing. More discussion is needed on specific measures Member States may want to put in place in transit hubs.

**NL** might implement testing on arrival, this is currently under discussion.

The **COM** asked about any bottlenecks in capacities in testing, contact tracing and whole genome sequencing; no Member State reported any specific issues so far.