

## Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

### Meeting Report

Tuesday 07/06/2022 at 16:00

#### 1. Ukraine – current health challenges and EU action

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Andrea Ammon, ECDC, provided the latest epidemiological information in relation to the war in Ukraine, based on regular meetings held with the neighbouring countries. The measures taken by the neighbouring countries facilitate health care and education for Ukrainian refugees. During the next meeting with the neighbouring countries, 8 June, Romania will share how the syndromic surveillance system is set up. ECDC is also preparing guidance for further medium- and long-term measures. Jointly with WHO, ECDC published a [guidance document for evaluating and strengthening early alert and response systems to acute public health events](#). Andrea Ammon highlighted that all of the ECDC training activities are public, including its e-learning courses.

#### 2. COVID-19 - Epidemiological situation and update on vaccines and therapeutics

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Andrea Ammon informed that overall notification rates of COVID-19 cases are going down in the EU/ EEA, although the case numbers are still quite high in comparison to last summer. The other key parameters (hospitalisation rate and ICU occupancy) are low. She addressed the special case of Portugal where the number of COVID-19 cases is increasing most likely because of the predominance of the omicron sub-lineage BA.5. Given the continued growth of [Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 variants](#), one or both of these sub-lineages may cause increased SARS-CoV-2 transmission in additional EU/EEA countries in the near future. Therefore, 2<sup>nd</sup> booster dose policies and timing as per recent ECDC guidance should be considered, and ECDC and EMA are preparing communication on the possible need of a fourth dose for the general population in autumn. Peter Piot informed about the Omicron subvariant BA.2.12.1 spreading in the US, which seems to be even more contagious than BA.4 and BA.5, but which did not lead to an increase of the hospitalisation rate yet.

Marco Cavaleri, EMA, provided an up-date on COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics. On the adapted vaccines, he stressed that Moderna is advancing rapidly on a bivalent vaccine. Pfizer/BioNTech is pursuing the strategy for an Omicron-adapted bivalent or monovalent vaccine. Several vaccine candidates as potential heterologous boosters are in development, such as the Hipra vaccine or Vidprevtyn by Sanofi Pasteur.

Henrique Barros (Portugal) informed that the cases of COVID-19 in Portugal are slowly decreasing, but that there is a slow increase in the number of hospital admissions and deaths (90% in the 75+ years old group). He stressed that the case number is also

decreasing in the 80+ years old group, which during the last weeks had been the highest during the entire COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted that the sub-lineage BA.5 is dominant with around 87% of all sequenced viral genomes (relatively stable). He informed that a higher risk of reinfection linked to BA.5 was observed.

Zoe Pana (Cyprus) informed that Cyprus is conducting studies on minority groups regarding the impact of COVID-19. It was agreed to discuss bias in clinical research and the need for more clinical trials for specific minority groups in the next meeting. Steven Van Gucht (Belgium) stressed the need for effective therapeutics including antivirals and monoclonal antibodies as key component of preparation for the autumn, complementary to vaccines. Peter Piot emphasised that such therapeutics may be particularly needed especially for the elderly and immuno-compromised. It was agreed to further discuss the role of therapeutics in the next meeting.

### **3. AOB – Hepatitis of unknown origin and monkeypox**

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ECDC informed on the increasing number of monkeypox cases: 586 certified cases reported from 18 EU countries and 437 from 10 non-EU countries. All of these are non-endemic countries. ECDC published a [risk assessment](#), 23 May, and is preparing a guidance document on [“Navigating monkeypox: considerations for gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men”](#) and [“Interim advice on Risk Communication and Community Engagement during the monkeypox outbreak in Europe, 2022”](#).

Marco Cavaleri explained that the Bavarian Nordic vaccine Imvanex is effective against monkey pox, although it has so far only been authorised for smallpox. He informed that the company will submit a request for an extension of indication to monkey pox. It is a third-generation vaccine, with a better benefit-risk profile than first and second generation vaccines. Member States can decide to use this vaccine for monkeypox on their territory through national emergency measures or compassionate use applications. He explained that clinical trial protocols are being developed that could be expanded globally. Peter Piot stressed that the US traditionally has stocks of smallpox vaccines and encouraged clinical trials on vaccines against monkeypox.

Henrique Barros (Portugal) developed on the monkey pox situation in Portugal, with an increasing number of cases, mostly men and in Lisbon. He added that only one case has been admitted to hospital.

### **4. Conclusions and suggestions for future agenda points**

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The next meeting will take place physically in Brussels on 23 June. It will be the opportunity for the participants to discuss further COVID-19 therapeutics, the vaccine strategy for the autumn season as well as the issue of clinical trials.

## Participation

### Member States participants:

1. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
2. Professor Alemka MARKOTIĆ (Croatia)
3. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
4. Dr Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
5. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
6. Dr Charles MALLIA-AZZOPARDI (Malta)
7. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
8. Professor Henrique Barros (Portugal)
9. Professor Diana PAUN (Romania)
10. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
11. Professor Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

### European Commission:

12. Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)
13. Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President
14. Sandra Gallina, Director General, DG SANTE
15. Pierre Delsaux, Director General, HERA
16. John F. Ryan, Acting Deputy Director General, DG SANTE
17. Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
18. Maria Luisa Llano Cardenal, Cabinet Expert, Vice-President Schinas
19. Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
20. Panayiotis Pourgourides, Cabinet Expert, Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
21. Karolina Herbout-Borcza, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
22. Thomas Van Cangh, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
23. Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE
24. Marta Moya Diaz, Head of Unit, Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE
25. Sigrid Weiland, Policy Officer, Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE
26. Clement Williamson, Policy Assistant to the Director General, HERA
27. Hannah Herzag, HERA
28. Peter Wagner, Secretariat General
29. Nicolas Pradalie, Secretariat General
30. Georgios Pepios, Trainee – Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
31. Elvire De Caebel, Trainee – Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE

### ECDC:

32. Andrea Ammon - Director

### EMA:

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