



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Public health
Health Security

Luxembourg, 27 October 2021

Health Security Committee

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, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, NO, CH, UK, AD, SM, DG SANTE, DG MOVE, DG HR, COUNCIL, ECDC, Coalition for Vaccination

Agenda points:

1. COVID-19 vaccination acceptance and uptake in the EU/EEA (intervention by ECDC and MS)
2. Flu Awareness Campaign 25 October (Presentation by ECDC and the Coalition for Vaccination)
3. AOB: ECDC update on the surveillance strategy document
4. AOB: Second meeting of the EWRS/PLF Joint Controllers
5. AOB: G7 Travel high-level principles for a safe and sustainable resumption of international travel
6. AOB: Potential shortage of Iodine-131 for nuclear medicine therapy in 2022
7. AOB: problems with issuing EU Digital Certificates for citizens vaccinated in another EU Member State
8. AOB: Preparation for the next HSC meeting on 3 November

Key Messages

1. COVID-19 vaccination acceptance and uptake in the EU/EEA

ECDC presented their [technical report](#) on “Facilitating COVID-19 vaccination acceptance and uptake in the EU/EEA”. The report focuses on understanding vaccination behaviours and the 5Cs model: confidence, complacency, constraints, calculation, and collective responsibility. The report lists a large number of interventions that Member States have implemented to increase the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. CZ, DE, IE, ES and SE volunteered to present their interventions and national experience during the HSC meeting.

To increase vaccination uptake, **CZ** established several (currently 14) **mobile vaccination teams** to reach individuals with limited access to healthcare services (e.g. socially excluded, homeless, people living in remote areas, people with disabilities, elderly, nursing homes). During the initial phase of the vaccination campaign, the focus was on nursing homes. During the late summer, the focus shifted to

hard-to-reach locations and groups. The mobile teams are coordinated at a regional level and cooperate closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

LV asked **CZ** how it is accessing vulnerable groups (e.g. drug users). **CZ** works closely with NGOs and vaccination is free, also for citizens without health insurance. A doctor is always present during the administration of vaccines.

DE established the **#hierwirdgeimpft** campaign in September 2021 for COVID-19 and in view of the upcoming influenza season. The main purpose of the campaign was to reach those who are still unvaccinated, to create greater awareness and have more local initiatives. States, municipalities, as well as partners and their channels, were involved in the implementation of the campaign. The Campaign resulted in more than 500,000 first COVID-19 vaccinations during the campaign period.

IE is currently focusing on the communication of COVID-19 public health advice for young adults. The Department of Health created the **SciComm Collective**, a network of Young Science Communicators from across Ireland, to talk to their peers through social media about the virus and the vaccine, and address mis- and disinformation directly.

Vaccine confidence in **ES** is high (as well as the COVID-19 vaccination coverage rate). **ES** had no major vaccine hesitant groups before the crisis and vaccination has never been compulsory in the country. **ES** adopted an **individual approach** in which: health care centers individually contacted everyone living in the country. During the summer, mobile units were placed in touristic places. **ES** had three major vaccination campaigns: during the beginning of the year, elderly and healthcare workers were addressed by using multi-cross media; during the summer with the help of influencers (Facebook, athletes); the last campaign focuses on the younger population (contacting schools, parents).

Swedish citizens have very high levels of **trust** in the Public Health Agency of Sweden and vaccine recommendations ($\geq 97\%$ coverage national immunisation programme). The agency has many years of experience in collecting data from the national vaccination register and vaccine acceptance studies to understand and address low acceptance and uptake.

The **COM** was interested in knowing the effect of the different vaccination campaigns. **DE** replied that it has seen good numbers in the reach of their campaign and in the vaccine uptake. **ECDC** mentioned that the campaigns should especially focus on individuals who have concerns about the vaccines and vaccination as some people still have questions that can be addressed. Transparency and consistency is key. It is important to listen and respond to their concerns and to reach them at their own terms.

2. Flu Awareness Campaign 25 October

During the week of 25-30 October, the **ECDC** is supporting the [World Health Organization's](#) annual Flu Awareness Campaign through various communication activities, such as social media messages, news items, etc. Indications show that influenza circulation is above the seasonal threshold in some places in the EU. A steep rise in flu infections during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could have serious consequences for the elderly and those with weakened immune systems and could place an additional burden on health systems already strained by COVID-19. Physical distancing and hygiene measures are

effective not only in curbing the spread of SARS-CoV-2, but also influenza. Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2 and flu provides good protection against severe disease.

The **Coalition for Vaccination** an initiative set up by the Commission to bring together European health professionals' and students' associations to advocate for vaccination, was invited to present. It is co-chaired by three major European health professionals associations, namely the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME), the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) and the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU). The Coalition has played a key role in the Commission's communication efforts around COVID-19 vaccination. The Coalition for Vaccination also advocates for vaccination more generally, and for this year's influenza season, they have made a statement targeting both at-risk groups and health professionals.

The **Coalition for Vaccination**, which also supports the WHO/Europe Flu Awareness Week, launched a statement: "[European Health Care Professionals recommend getting vaccinated against flu also this year](#)". The Coalition warned about a possible increase in influenza circulation and severity and recommended people, especially those **at-risk groups**, to protect themselves by getting the flu vaccine, and by maintaining hygiene and physical distancing measures.

AOB points

3. AOB: ECDC update on the surveillance strategy document

ECDC provided the HSC with an overview on the surveillance strategy [document](#) published on 18 October 2021. Key messages highlighted during the meeting include:

- Systems should allow for **integrated surveillance** of COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory pathogens.
- Current **influenza surveillance systems are not sufficiently sensitive** and representative to enable joint COVID-19 surveillance.
- Countries should focus on **reporting symptomatic cases**, to improve comparability.
- If comprehensive testing of all those presenting with symptoms is not feasible, a representative subset of symptomatic cases should be tested, preferably through a PCR test.
- A representative subset of SARS-CoV-2 positive specimens should be sequenced. **Genomic surveillance** of representative samples should be coupled with targeted comprehensive sampling in special settings or populations.
- Monitoring of vaccine effectiveness should be carried out through ad hoc studies, possibly embedded in surveillance systems.
- Countries should continue monitoring mortality and consider sero-epidemiological surveys among **complementary systems** which will help meet the main surveillance objectives.

4. AOB: Second meeting of the EWRS/PLF Joint Controllers

The second meeting of the **Joint Controllers** on the **Early Warning and Response System** (EWRS) for communicable diseases and the **electronic Passenger Locator Form** (ePLF) took place on 19 October. The meeting slides and draft minutes will be shared in the new CIRCABC space created for the EWRS/ePLF Joint controllers.

5. AOB: G7 Travel high-level principles for a safe and sustainable resumption of international travel

The **COM** shared the [G7 Travel high-level principles](#) for a safe and sustainable resumption of international travel document with the HSC.

6. AOB: Potential shortage of Iodine-131 for nuclear medicine therapy in 2022

The **COM** passed information on a **potential shortage of Iodine-131** (active pharmaceutical ingredient) for **nuclear medicine therapy in 2022**. The European Observatory on the Supply of Medical Radioisotopes and the industry association Nuclear Medicine Europe will cooperate to provide a better overview of demand and supply for Iodine-131 in 2022 and will follow up on the topic as needed.

7. AOB: problems with issuing EU Digital Certificates for citizens vaccinated in another EU Member State

The **Slovak Republic** raised several problems regarding Slovak citizens who have been vaccinated in other EU Member State, and where they were refused an EU Digital COVID Certificates for various reasons. According to EU legislation, every vaccinated person in an EU Member State should be issued the EU Digital COVID Certificate. The **COM** and Slovakia will follow-up bilaterally to better understand the situation.

8. AOB: Preparation for the next HSC meeting on 3 November

The **next HSC meeting** will take place on 3 November, where the **United States** will present their new travel measures.