



General Working Group of the Health Security Committee Meeting

Wednesday 20 March 2024 – 10:00-12:00
Flash Report

1. Epidemiological update on communicable diseases – ECDC

ECDC reported on the epidemiological situation in the EU/EEA countries on psittacosis, respiratory diseases and measles. Five countries (AT, DK, DE, NL, SE) reported the seasonal **increase of psittacosis** cases between December 2023 and mid-January 2024. Several other countries informed about the lack of national surveillance data because psittacosis is not a notifiable disease. **Chlamydia psittaci** is the predominant agent causing psittacosis present in both avian and human populations. Surveillance data do not indicate a change or increase of risk in general human population in the EU/EEA. The **overall risk remains very low**. As prevention measures ECDC is advising that a close contact with infected birds should be avoided and hygiene measures should be applied (hand washing).

The epidemiological situation of the **respiratory viruses** (SARS-Cov2, Influenza, RSV) remains the same as in the week 10 (04 March-10 March). The activity largely driven by influenza is **decreasing** in the EU/EEA but remains above baseline levels in some countries (surveillance data in primary and secondary care). The influenza **vaccine effectiveness** is **53%** (mild case) and **44 %** (severe cases). RSV activity decreased overall in the EU/EEA countries, although the country-level picture remains mixed and some countries continue to report increasing hospital and/or ICU admissions. SARS-CoV-2 activity is low in all EU/EEA countries.

The data collected between Jan 2019 and Jan 2024 show an overall **increase of measles** cases in the EU/EEA since June 2023. 84% of all cases in 2023 are reported in Romania where the most recent update in March shows 8 deaths. This trend will continue due to sub-optimal vaccination coverage, potential spread from high concentration areas and a seasonal peak. ECDC urged the EU/EEA public health authorities to focus on the following areas: increasing vaccination coverage, better surveillance, clinical awareness of health professionals, and improving the vaccine uptake.

2. Sexually transmitted infections (STI)

ECDC presented an **increasing** trend of the STIs in the last decade in both homosexual (Men that have sex with Men (MSM)) and heterosexual populations (all age groups): [gonorrhoea](#), [syphilis](#), [congenital syphilis](#), [chlamydia](#). Several hypotheses for increase were suggested (changes in testing, increased transmission), however no clear indication for the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been indicated. There is a need to enhance prevention, preparedness and response capacity with a multi-sector collaboration.

a. Discussion and information from countries

Denmark, the Netherlands, and Ireland gave a short update on the STI situation in their countries. They reflected the overall situation with increasing trends. To prevent STIs they focus on encouraging the use of condoms/barriers, developing new strategies against new case of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2030 goals), and remain open for input and experience from other countries. The Netherlands has no new resources to prepare actions at the moment. Ireland proposed notification of partners, use of condoms and testing as prevention tools, and is planning research to investigate the root cause of the increase.

3. Preliminary findings and recommendations from Report on EU/EEA countries' Prevention, Preparedness and Response Planning 2023 (Article 7 of the Regulation 2022/2371) – DG SANTE

DG SANTE gave a short overview of preliminary key findings/challenges and recommendations of the “Report on EU/EEA countries’ Prevention, Preparedness and Response Planning 2023”. These preliminary findings are neither final nor exhaustive. They will be shared with the Technical Working Group on Preparedness (TWG on Prep), the General Working Group (GWG), and subsequently the senior level Health Security Committee (HSC). The full report will be shared with the TWG on Prep and the GWG HSC by the end of May. The documents will be shared with the countries via a secured exchange in the EWRS.

4. Coordination of response within the HSC, update on article 21 of the Regulation 2022/2371 implementing act – DG SANTE

DG SANTE presented the main changes to the article 21 on Coordination of response with the HSC, following the country comments. Three main areas were addressed: **use of EWRS** as the primary tool for communication, **timeframes** for notifications and **coordination** process. EWRS is designed to be used for sensitive information in personal data and posting is limited to countries and EC. There are many different modules that can be leveraged. According to the Decision (EU) 2017/253 the timeframes can be adapted depending on the urgency. Lastly, more details on how the HSC will collaborate with IPCR, Advisory Committee and Health Crisis Board will be provided. EC is now discussing with the different concerned parties and an updated version of the text will be shared soon with the HSC.

5. Overview of the HSC workplan 2024 – DG SANTE

The 2024 workplan will be similar to the 2023 one and will consist of the following main areas: working methods of the Health Security Committee and its working groups, implementation of specific articles of the Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 including specific implementing acts and other actions requiring HSC activity. The draft will be shared with GWG for comments and next with the senior level HSC.

6. AOB

Italy presented national recommendations on prevention and control of *Aedes aegypti* vector importation at the Point of Entries (PoEs) defined in the National Plan for Prevention, Surveillance and Response to Arboviruses 2020-2025. The Ministry of Health of Italy issued three documents to mitigate the issue. Different **measures** are applied depending on the PoE: **air route**, **maritime route** and **goods at risk**. The implementation of control measures at PoE is still under evaluation. Italy proposed to HSC/EU-EEA countries to work on the HSC opinion on PoEs control measures at EU level.

7. Conclusions

- The HSC supported by ECDC is going to towards the potential opinion of the HSC on STIs.
- The HSC with ECDC support will start preparatory steps for the potential HSC opinion on PoEs control measures at EU level for vector borne diseases.
- The HSC secretariat will share two documents: “**Preliminary findings and recommendations from Report on EU/EEA countries’ Prevention, Preparedness and Response Planning 2023**” and “**Draft of the the HSC workplan 2024**” for country comments.