

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

### Meeting Report

Wednesday 08/12/2021 at 16:00

#### 1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

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Commissioner Kyriakides informed about the outcome of the Council meeting that took place on 7 December and the concerns expressed by Member States in the face of the current epidemiological situation. Commissioner Kyriakides called upon Member States to bridge the immunisation gap, offer boosters to eligible populations, and maintain/introduce relevant non-pharmaceutical interventions as appropriate.

ECDC updated on the latest situation, focusing more specifically on the Omicron Variant of Concern. ECDC echoed the recommendations from Commissioner Kyriakides, emphasising the importance of an early implementation in the epidemic curve of non-pharmaceutical interventions measures to maximise their impact on controlling waves of infections. Measures that work for the Delta variant also apply for Omicron. Timely sequencing and contact tracing should also be in place to slow down the spread of the virus.

ECDC informed about the latest scientific studies on Omicron. While cases observed so far have been mild, early signs in terms of transmissibility and possible immune escape are of some concern. Current studies, based on small number of cases, show, as expected, a reduction in neutralisation power of antibodies. These early results do not necessarily translate into a reduction in vaccine effectiveness, in particular against severe outcomes. There is a clear need for further and larger studies. Given the growing number of infections observed in the EU, including a growing number without link to travel to the most affected areas, attention will need to shift from travel-related measures to community measures. Early modelling shows that Omicron would replace Delta in the coming months although co-circulation scenarios cannot be excluded. ECDC plans to publish an updated risk assessment end of next week. ECDC is also finalising a protocol to assess COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness studies during outbreaks in semi-closed settings in the EU/EEA. ECDC intends to implement it with some Member States for early assessments of vaccine effectiveness.

Member States experts exchanged on the importance of rapidly collecting and analysing real world data on Omicron, notably on vaccine effectiveness as well as possible changes in severity of disease.

Prof. Piot shared recent updates and studies being conducted in South Africa.

#### 1. COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics

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EMA updated on contacts with **vaccine** manufacturer to ensure a timely authorisation of a possible omicron-adapted vaccine, should one be needed. At this point, additional and more mature data on cross neutralisation is required to better assess the impact of omicron on vaccine effectiveness. In addition, real world evidence will be pivotal as cross neutralisation data does not provide all answers, e.g. with respect to cellular immune response. Companies are exploring different approaches to booster doses. EMA indicated several elements that would need to be carefully considered before deciding to switch to adapted vaccines.

EMA and ECDC published this week recommendations on heterologous vaccination courses against COVID-19 ([link](#)). Based on studies by academic groups, there are indications that heterologous schemes could increase the breadth of protection.

EMA updates on the landscape regarding **therapeutics**, with one treatment currently under rolling review, four for which a marketing authorisation application has been submitted and four authorised in the EU ([link](#)).

Experts exchanged on national approaches towards boosting and the observed waning of immunity following the primary series, currently made of two doses (or one for the Janssen vaccine). Some also indicated possible future needs for different vaccines based on different technology platforms, with different properties (e.g. in terms of breadth of protection, or ability to prevent infections).

## 2. AOB

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The next meeting is scheduled on Monday 20 December at 16:00

## **Participation**

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### Member States participants:

1. Professor Markus MÜLLER (Austria)
2. Professor Steven VAN GUCHT (Belgium)
3. Professor Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
4. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
5. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
6. Professor Roman CHLIBEK (Czech Republic)
7. Professor Helene PROBST (Denmark)
8. Professor Irja LUTSAR (Estonia)
9. Professor Taneli PUUMALAINEN (Finland)
10. Professor Arnaud FONTANET (FRANCE)
11. Dr Christophe BAYER (Germany)
12. Professor Sotiris TSIODRAS (Greece)
13. Mr Miklós SZOCSKA (Hungary)
14. Dr Darina O’FLANAGAN (Ireland)
15. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
16. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
17. Professor Edita SUZIEDELIENE (Lithuania)
18. Jean-Claude SCHMIT (Luxembourg)
19. Professor Aura TIMEN (The Netherlands)
20. Professor Andrzej HORBAN (Poland)
21. Professor Henrique BARROS (Portugal)
22. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
23. Mr Milan KREK (Slovenia)
24. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
25. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

### European Commission:

Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner (Chair)  
Professor Peter Piot, Special Advisor to EU Commission President  
Anna Carnegie, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot  
Sandra Gallina, Director General, DG SANTE  
Pierre Delsaux, Director General, HERA  
Giorgos Rossides, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides  
Kurt Vandenberghe, Member of Cabinet of President von der Leyen  
Roberto Reig Rodrigo, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides  
Daphne Von Buxhoeveden, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides  
Chrystalla Papanastasiou-Constantinou, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides  
Thomas Van Canghai, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE  
Cristina Modoran, Policy Assistant to the Director General, DG SANTE

Sigrid Weiland, Policy Officer, Strategy and Coordination Unit, DG SANTE

Peter Wagner, Secretariat General

Jeremy Bray, Secretariat General

Nicolas Pradalie, Secretariat General

ECDC

Andrea Ammon, Director

Bruno Ciancio, Head of Surveillance

EMA

Emer Cooke, Executive Director

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