

Meeting of the EU scientific advice platform on COVID-19

Meeting Report

Thursday 05/08/2021 at 17:00

1. COVID-19 Epidemiological update

Commissioner Kyriakides addressed the members of the platform about the current epidemiological situation which continues to change across Member States.

ECDC provided an update on the epidemiological situation. Cases have been rising across the EU/EEA Member States for five consecutive weeks. 90 % of all cases appear to be as a result of the circulating Delta variant. Hospital admissions and death notifications have seen a small rise, but the situation remains fairly stable. Over the last weeks, cases have been increasing among younger age groups. Vaccination rates are increasing across Member States with 73 % of the adult population having received at least one dose of the vaccine and 60 % being fully vaccinated, and vaccination is helping to drive the incidence rate down. The data seems to indicate that the large proportion of hospitalisations and cases are among people who are unvaccinated.

Experts exchanged views on the current epidemiological situation and incidence rates in their Member States. Most experts showed concern over the increase in hospitalisations in young adults and in unvaccinated people. Most of the experts confirmed that the Delta variant continues to be the dominant variant in their Member States, and that unvaccinated people account for the majority of hospitalised cases.

2. COVID-19 vaccination – State of play

Some Member States are considering booster doses (third doses), especially for immunocompromised or high risk populations. Most experts confirmed they have started vaccinating adolescents (12+) but have faced challenges related to vaccine hesitancy and misinformation. Some Member States informed that as vaccination seems to be plateauing, they have opted for mobile vaccination teams to help increase vaccination rates.

EMA gave an update on their vaccine evaluations which are ongoing, including for the Sinovac, Sputnik, and CureVac vaccines. The running review for these vaccines is still ongoing. Two other vaccines are being evaluated, Sanofi and Novavax, for which EMA expects to form an opinion by the end of this year. On the authorised vaccines, EMA informed that they continue to be highly effective against the circulating variants. On the need of a booster dose, EMA is expecting data from BioNTech-Pfizer to be able to issue a recommendation for a third dose, probably in the beginning of September.

On safety reports, EMA informed there are no significant safety concerns to be reported. They have received concerns over menstrual disorders related to vaccination, and their Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) is gathering comprehensive data to help establish or exclude a causal link to the vaccines.

3. Any other points

Commissioner Kyriakides informed the experts that she has requested both EMA and ECDC to provide recommendations on booster vaccines, and heterologous vaccination.

4. Conclusions and suggestions for future agenda points

The next call will take place on 19 August 2021 at 17:00

Participation

1. Dr Angel KUNCHEV (Bulgaria)
2. Professor Alemka MARKOTIC (Croatia)
3. Dr Zoe PANA (Cyprus)
4. Professor Helene Probst (Denmark)
5. Dr. Hans-Ulrich HOLTHERM (Germany)
6. Mr Ronan Glynn (Ireland)
7. Professor Silvio BRUSAFERRO (Italy)
8. Professor Uga DUMPIS (Latvia)
9. Dr Charles Mallia Azzopardi (Malta)
10. Professor Henrique DE BARROS (Portugal)
11. Professor Diana Loreta PAUN (Romania)
12. Professor Pavol JARCUSKA (Slovakia)
13. Dr Anders TEGNELL (Sweden)

European Commission:

- Commissioner Stella KYRIAKIDES (Chair)
- Prof. Peter PIOT, Special Advisor to the President of the European Commission
- Julia SPENCER, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
- Anna Carnegie, Policy Advisor to Prof. Piot
- Pierre Delsaux, Deputy - Director General, DG SANTE
- Roberto REIG RODRIGO, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Daphne Von Buxhoeveden, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Chrystalla PAPANASTASIOU-CONSTANTINOOU, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyriakides
- Martine INGVORSEN, Policy Officer, DG SANTE
- Katherine POOLE-LEHNHOFF, Policy Officer, DG SANTE

ECDC

- Mike Catchpole, Chief Scientist, Scientific Methods and Standards (SMS)

EMA

- Alexis Nolte, Head of Human Medicines Division
- Ivo Claassen, Head of Veterinary Medicines