

## COVID-19 EU update

### **European Commission:**

- The European Commission has set [key actions for a united front to beat COVID-19](#) including goals of having a minimum 80% of people over 80 and of health and social care professionals in every Member State being vaccinated by March 2021. The goal by summer 2021 would be to have vaccinated a minimum of 70% of the adult population in member states. A common approach is to be agreed upon by end of January 2021 to allow member states' vaccination certificates to be readily useable in health systems across the globe. The Commission calls on member states to continue to apply physical distancing, limit social contacts, fight disinformation, coordinate travel restrictions, increase testing and contact tracing as well as genome sequencing (to 5% or preferably 10% of positive test results), facing the increasing risks of mutations. They also call on member states to adapt testing strategies in light of new mutations and expand the use of rapid antigen tests.  
The Commission also underlines measures to reduce risk of transmission linked to travel, stating that all non-essential travel should be strongly discouraged until a considerable improvement of the epidemiological situation. The Commission is furthermore going to set up a Team Europe mechanism to structure provisions of vaccines shared by member states with partner countries to ensure early access to vaccines.
- The European Commission has published its [coronavirus vaccine contract with German drugmaker CureVac](#) online. Still, the document redacts key information, including the down payment made by the Commission and the price per dose, issues raised repeatedly by MEPs who viewed the contract in a reading room last week.

### **European Parliament:**

- [MEPs denounce measures taken by authoritarian regimes concerning human rights and COVID 19:](#) On 21.01.2021 the European Parliament concerned over many authoritarian regimes having used the pandemic to repress civil society and critical voices. I.a. MEPs push for new EU global human right sanctions regime to be implemented urgently as essential part of EUs existing human rights and foreign policy toolbox.
- [Portuguese Presidency wants EU to deliver on vaccines, recovery and transition:](#) Portuguese Prime minister Antonio Costa addressed i.a. challenges relating to the vaccination campaign, international solidarity in tackling the pandemic, the need to act on climate change, digital services, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the EU's international relations. The debate also highlighted the economic and social emergency caused by COVID-19 crisis, condemned unilateral actions by member states concerning vaccinations and asked that recovery funds focus on creating jobs and reducing inequalities.
- [MEPs adopt technical support instrument to speed up post COVID 19 recovery:](#) The tool aims to help EU countries prepare recovery plans to access funding from recovery and resilience facility. It aims to enable action on digitalisation and administrative structures and public services, in particular healthcare, education or judiciary, creating policies to help people retain for labour market and building resilient care systems and coordinated response capabilities.
- The European Parliament issued a [Press Release](#) stating that the EU must respond with unity and solidarity when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines. The majority of MEPs expressed support for the common EU strategy but called for complete transparency regarding terms of contracts between the

EU and pharmaceutical companies involving public money and the deployment of vaccines. The MEPs deemed recent efforts by the commission to allow MEPs to consult one incomplete contact to be insufficient and reiterated that complete transparency is key in combating disinformation and building trust in vaccination campaigns across Europe. They also acknowledge the need for comparable national data and mutual recognition of vaccinations and the need to avoid delays and increase the speed of the vaccination process.

- The European Parliament's health committee wants the Commission and Portuguese presidency to push countries to publish their vaccine delivery schedules. French MEP Pascal Canfin, writing on behalf of the majority of committee's coordinators, has [sent letters](#) to both Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides and Portuguese Health Minister Marta Temido expressing "serious concern" that EU countries have yet to publish monthly vaccine delivery schedules. The majority of coordinators noted that countries can voluntarily submit information about vaccination distribution to the ECDC. "However, beyond such a voluntary data collection system, we call for an increase EU coordination to allow for the publication of this data, allowing all of us to have a fact-based debate," MEP Canfin wrote.

#### **Council:**

- The Council unanimously [agreed on strengthening use of rapid antigen tests and on the mutual recognition of COVID-19 test results](#) (rapid antigen tests and RTPCR tests), stating that this will be a central tool to help mitigate the spread of the virus. The recommendations includes the sharing of standardised sets of data through digital platforms, the development of a common list of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests and the prioritisation of situations for using such tests (e.g. contact to confirmed cases, outbreak clusters etc.). They also state that the list of appropriate rapid antigen tests should be flexible enough for addition or removal of those whose efficacy is impacted by mutations. Full recommendations available [here](#).

#### **EMA:**

- Global regulators highlight [key role of healthcare professionals in fostering confidence in COVID-19 vaccines](#). EMA has endorsed a joint statement by the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA) to inform and help healthcare professionals answer questions about the evaluation, approval and monitoring of safe, effective and high-quality COVID-19 vaccines. ICMRA has developed this statement to support healthcare professionals when talking to members of the general public to reassure them that the regulatory processes for the authorisation and safety monitoring of COVID-19 vaccines are robust, independent and driven by patient and public health needs. The statement explains how COVID-19 vaccines undergo scientific evaluation to determine their safety, efficacy and quality. They also reiterate that regulators continue to rigorously monitor the safety of vaccines after approval for use. ICMRA members emphasise that regulators, in collaboration with public health authorities, are able to take decisive action if and when a safety issue is identified.
- EMA published the European [public assessment report for COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna](#).
- EMA info-card for patients on [how to report suspected side effects](#) with medicines is now available in all EU languages.

## ECDC:

- ECDC released a [rapid assessment of laboratory practices and needs related to COVID-19](#). The assessment notes that the EU have increased their laboratory capacity tremendously over the past 11 months as the majority of the Member States reported sufficient testing capacity until March 2021. Many countries are adding rapid antigen detection tests (RADT) to their testing strategies in order to reduce pressure on RT-PCR testing. The main bottlenecks, such as shortages of laboratory consumables and human resources, as well as sample storing facilities, continue to exist and may affect the overall laboratory response to COVID-19.
- ECDC updated its [technical guidance on sequencing of SARS-CoV-2](#) that aims to provide guidelines to laboratories and relevant stakeholders in making decisions on establishing sequencing capacities and capabilities, in making decisions on which technologies to use and/or in deciding on the role of sequencing for SARS-CoV-2 diagnostics, research, outbreak investigations and surveillance. It addresses the most used sequencing technologies and their applications and proposes a central standardisation process to analyse and report the findings of SARS-CoV-2 genetic characterisations. In the context of the recently identified new variant (SARS-CoV-2 VOC 202012/01) reported by the UK, and the urgent need to assess the extent to which it is circulating in the EU, the document includes a section on sampling approaches.
- ECDC updated its risk [assessment related to the spread of new SARS-CoV-2 variants](#). This risk assessment presents the latest available information on the recent emergence of three variants of concern, VOC 202012/01 identified in the UK, 501Y.V2 identified in South Africa, and P.1 identified in Brazil and Japan. These variants are considered to be of concern because of mutations which have led to increased transmissibility and deteriorating epidemiological situations in the areas where they have recently become established. Based on the new information, the risk associated with the introduction and community spread of variants of concern has been increased to high/very high and the options for response have been adjusted to the current situation.

## WHO/WHO Europe:

- [WHO supports European countries' response to new virus variant](#): In addition to continuing test and trace programmes as well as the roll-out of vaccines, WHO-Europe recommends to sharing the results of sequencing with other countries. It also recognizes that temporary travel restrictions have been put in place, however it is also highlighted that travel should not be affected unnecessarily.

## Webinars/Other Reports:

- On Friday 29 January at 10.15 CET, the European Commission's Health and Food Safety Directorate will host a webinar on "Building a European Health Union for stronger EU preparedness and response for health crises" with participation of Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella Kyriakides. Find [here](#) the detailed agenda and link to register to this webinar.
- [COVID-19: the intersection of education and health](#): The Lancet has published an editorial on how the disruption in education systems during the pandemic has caused both an immediate and longer term impact on children's health. It discusses the interaction between education and health, both in terms of causal loops leading to inequalities, but also calls for better education in sexual and reproductive health and rights, child nutrition, and mental health.