

Summary

Virtual meeting at Deputy-level on the Commission's Communication "Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks" (COM (2020) 318 final)

Berlin, 29 July 2020

On the initiative of the German Presidency, a virtual meeting of Member States, EFTA countries and the European Commission was held on 22 July 2020 to have an initial exchange of views on the Commission's Communication "Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks". Based on the interventions of participants, the outcome of the discussion can be summarised as follows:

Participants generally welcomed and supported the Commission's Communication, while indicating the need for further discussion of details. In the discussion, participants clearly emphasized the importance of measures proposed under **Section 1 "Testing, contact tracing and public health surveillance"** in the Commission's Communication.

Section 1: "Testing, contact tracing and public health surveillance"

Participants highlighted the need for an improved cross-border crisis management. This includes aligned testing strategies, interoperable contact tracing and warning apps, the exchange of information and comparable data. In addition, making use of new technologies (*inter alia* digital passenger locator cards) was referred to.

The running of stress tests for contact tracing systems, testing capacities and testing deployment in the current situation should be left up to the discretion of Member States on the basis of available resources. In this context, the Presidency recalled the results of the Informal Meeting of Health Ministers on 16 July and stressed the importance of strengthening the ECDC including the establishment of a Health Task Force.

Section 2: “Medical countermeasures (...)”

Participants put emphasis on the importance to build and maintain production capacities for PPE, medicinal products as well as medical devices in Europe. Participants stressed the need for an evaluation of the functioning of the JPA mechanism during the crisis. In addition, it was made clear in numerous interventions that swiftly finalising agreements on the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines is paramount. The Presidency calls upon the Commission to pursue this goal with the utmost urgency.

Section 3: “Health surge capacity”

In the eyes of the Presidency, it became evident from the various interventions that there is a need to refine the national procedures concerning the cross-border transfer of patients and to better exchange information.

Section 4: “Non-pharmaceutical countermeasures”

Participants expressed great interest in the EU handbook on COVID-19 non-pharmaceutical interventions, which is currently being drafted by the ECDC. The Presidency calls upon the ECDC to share a draft of the handbook with Member States as early as possible. Participants once again stressed the importance of an information exchange facilitated by the ECDC.

Section 5: “Support to vulnerable groups”

Participants expressed broad support for actions in the field of vulnerable groups and settings (e. g. outbreaks in slaughterhouse settings or mines). Participants showed interest in sharing best practices in this area and stressed the importance of ECDC guidelines.

Section 6: “Reducing the burden of seasonal influenza”

Participants stressed their support for comprehensive influenza vaccination campaigns at national level in order to reach a high vaccination coverage to mitigate the risk of simultaneous outbreaks of COVID-19 and influenza.

The Presidency calls on the Commission to provide Member States with an update on the implementation of the various actions in the first week of September.