



COVID-19: Commission calls on Member States to step up preparedness for the next pandemic phase

Brussels, 27 April 2022

The Commission is today proposing a set of actions to manage the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the next one. By working together, the EU has so far saved hundreds of thousands of lives thanks to COVID-19 vaccines, kept its single market operational, minimised travel restrictions and mobilised manufacturing capacity of critical products when supply chains were disrupted. In the new phase of the pandemic, where preparedness and response need to be sustained, coordination will be, once more, essential. The Commission therefore calls on Member States to take actions before autumn to ensure vigilance and continued coordination of health preparedness and response.

Remaining vigilant while transitioning out of the acute COVID-19 phase

The current lower levels of COVID-19 infection offer the Member States the opportunity to strengthen their surveillance, healthcare systems, and overall pandemic preparedness. In particular, the Commission invites Member States to:

- Step up **vaccination and boosting**, taking into account the simultaneous circulation of COVID-19 and seasonal influenza;
- Set up integrated **surveillance systems** that are no longer based on the identification and reporting of all COVID-19 cases, but rather on obtaining reliable and representative estimates;
- Continue targeted **testing and sequencing** of sufficient samples to accurately estimate variant circulation and detect new variants;
- Invest in the **recovery of healthcare systems** and assess the wider health impacts of the pandemic, including on mental health and delays in treatments and care;
- Apply EU coordinated **rules to ensure free and safe travel**, both within the EU and with international partners;
- Support the development of the **next generation of vaccines and therapeutics**;
- Intensify collaboration against **mis- and disinformation** on COVID-19 vaccines;
- Continue to **deploy global solidarity and improve global governance**.

In addition, the Commission is announcing actions to ensure resilient supply chains throughout the pandemic, both for medical countermeasures and for critical products across all industrial ecosystems. It is also launching today a tender, under the EU FAB initiative, to reserve capacities for manufacturing mRNA, protein and vector-based vaccines. This will reserve newly created manufacturing capacity for use in future health emergencies. The tender is addressed to vaccine producers with facilities in the EU/EEA, who can send in their request to participate until 3 June 2022 16.00 CEST.

Medium and long term include the further enhancing of pandemic preparedness and strengthening response coordination between Member States, as well as at the global level, implementing the European Health Union proposals, tackling wider health impacts of the pandemic, including "long COVID" and the burden on mental health, and speeding up digitalisation in health.

Members of the College said:

The President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, said: *"We are entering a new phase of the pandemic, as we move from emergency mode to a more sustainable management of COVID-19. Yet, we must remain vigilant. Infection numbers are still high in the EU and many people are still dying from COVID-19 worldwide. Moreover, new variants can emerge and spread fast. But we know the way forward. We need to further step-up vaccination and boosting, and targeted testing – and we need to continue to coordinate our responses closely in the EU."*

Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, Margaritis **Schinas**, said: *«The COVID-19*

pandemic is not over and the virus is here to stay. While the health situation is improving, we must prepare for different scenarios, and do it in a coordinated way. New variants are not a question of if but rather a question of when. Improvisation and fragmentation are not an option. Vigilance and preparedness remain as essential as ever and we must continue our work without respite. For these reasons, we are taking actions at national and EU level building on the successful EU-wide coordination for health preparedness and response. We shift from firefighters to architects, of a Health Union that protects public health while keeping society and economy open and resilient."

Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry **Breton**, said: *"The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of readily available vaccine production capacity in times of crisis. Following an unprecedented ramp-up, the EU reached a production capacity equivalent to 3-4 billion vaccines per year. EU FAB will allow us to preserve some of this capacity and keep it operational for future health crises. This is a cornerstone of the industrial dimension of our health emergency preparedness."*

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella **Kyriakides**, said: *"Vaccination, our strong coordinated EU approach and natural immunity provides a much welcome window of opportunity to move from emergency mode to a more sustainable management of COVID-19. Infection numbers are still high in the EU, but the pressure on the healthcare sector has been reduced and our societies and economies have reopened again. Our citizens can finally enjoy this period with much fewer restrictions on daily life, after two and half extraordinary and difficult years. It is however crucial that Member States maintain a high level of vigilance and preparedness for new outbreaks and variants—the pandemic is not yet over. We need to do more to vaccinate globally, now that vaccine supply is no longer a challenge. How COVID-19 continues to impact our lives in the coming years will be heavily dependent on the decisions we take today, in the EU and globally."*

Background

While fluctuating case numbers are observed across Europe, increases are not leading to severe disease or death as often as before thanks to widespread vaccination. The now dominant Omicron variant is less severe than previous variants. However, infections are still in the millions worldwide. Many people are in lockdowns in some parts of the world. Many are still suffering or dying from COVID-19. Waning immunity against infection, and possible winter seasonality also increase the risk that new variants of SARS-CoV-2 – the virus that causes COVID-19 – will emerge and spread.

While Member States are implementing new approaches to manage the ongoing pandemic, fragmented preparedness and response strategies risk undermining the benefits that EU-wide coordination of health security measures has brought so far.

This Communication therefore puts forward an approach for the management of this new phase of the pandemic, building on the successful EU-wide coordination for health preparedness and response.

The "EU FAB" initiative was announced in February 2021 to set up ever warm vaccine production facilities and ensure that current EU/EEA manufacturing capacities for mRNA, protein and vector-based vaccine types are maintained for future public health emergencies. To establish EU FAB, a tender procedure will be published in Tender Electronic Daily, Supplement to the Official Journal.

For More Information:

[Communication on COVID-19 sustaining EU preparedness and response](#)

[Coronavirus response](#)

[Safe COVID-19 vaccines](#)

[Factsheet: COVID-19 – Sustaining EU Preparedness and Response: Looking ahead](#)

[Factsheet: EU FAB](#)

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