

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002015/20
to the Commission
César Luena (S&D)
(1 April 2020)**

Subject: European health response to the COVID-19 outbreak — Early Warning and Response System

On 31 December 2019, China notified the WHO of several cases of an atypical pneumonia in Wuhan of unknown origin. The new virus causing this new disease was identified on 7 January 2020 and the first cases outside of China were reported on 7 January in Thailand and on 16 January in Japan.

Wuhan was only effectively quarantined on 23 January and, given the globalised world in which we live, the possibility that the virus was inadvertently spreading around the world before then was a very real one.

The Commission has an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) specifically created to monitor such situations, alert Member States and issue recommendations. Member States were not prepared for this situation, did not have adequate sanitary measures in place and had not provided themselves with the necessary protective equipment and medicines. In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. Did the EWRS alert Member States to the severity and risks of the epidemic?
2. What criteria did it use to determine the risk of an epidemic?
3. What measures are being taken to prevent such a situation from recurring in the future?

**Answer given by Ms Kyriakides on behalf of the European Commission
(24 July 2020)**

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) informed the Commission on 7 January 2020 that 27 cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology, including seven severe cases, were reported in Wuhan, China, with a common exposure to a seafood market. Authorities placed all cases under isolation, but did not yet identify a causative pathogen for the viral pneumonia. At that time, no human-to-human transmission or deaths were documented. On 9 January 2020, based on a threat assessment from ECDC, the Commission posted the first notification on the pneumonia on the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS).

The decision to post a notification is based on criteria defined in the decision 1082/2013 on serious cross-border health threats⁽¹⁾ and involves expert assessment regarding the potential for a cross-border health threat, which is what ECDC provided in its first threat assessment on 9 January 2020. The first rapid risk assessment on COVID-19 was published on 17 January 2020 and shared with the Member States through EWRS.

The Health Security Committee (HSC) was established as a formal mechanism for rapid information exchange, consultation and coordination of preparedness and response to health threats across Member States, including control measures and communication messages. Its first meeting on COVID-19 was held on 17 January 2020. As more information was gathered about this virus, ECDC updated its risk assessment.

A significant number of health related but also socio economic measures⁽²⁾ have been taken to minimise the spread of the virus and its impact on the European societies. Improving Europe's preparedness and response to pandemics will be informed by a comprehensive lessons learnt exercise once the threat of the pandemic has waned.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D1082&from=EN>

⁽²⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en