

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-003585/20
to the Commission
Günther Sidl (S&D), Hannes Heide (S&D)
(15 June 2020)**

Subject: ECDC — risk assessment in the context of COVID-19 and future measures

In the risk assessment it published as recently as in February 2020, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), whose task it is to identify, assess and warn about risks and new threats to public health, stated only that the continuing global spread of COVID-19 was likely, but assessed the risk involved as moderate and suggested that it could be reduced further by means of exit screenings conducted by the authorities in Wuhan.

The ECDC did also state, however, that the lack of detailed epidemiological studies meant that there were significant uncertainties surrounding the assessment of the likely spread of the virus.

1. What measures does the Commission plan to take to guarantee more effective crisis management in the future, involving all the Member States, and the more effective pooling of resources and specialist knowledge?
2. In the light of the risk assessments drawn up in January and February, did the ECDC wait too long before issuing a warning about the virus?
3. What measures does the Commission plan to take to ensure that there is no repeat of the situation we are currently experiencing, that an early-warning system is developed and that information is forwarded to the Member States in a timely manner, to prevent states from going it alone and taking unilateral steps such as closing borders, which led to shipments of medical equipment being held up?

**Answer given by Ms Kyriakides on behalf of the European Commission
(4 November 2020)**

The Commission is reflecting on lessons learnt and how EU-level responses can be improved.

The Commission continues to operate the Early Warning and Response System with the support of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Member States inform each other of cases of communicable diseases and report on measures. These are discussed in the Health Security Committee every week ⁽¹⁾.

In addition, in March 2020, the Commission established the COVID-19 Clinical Management Support System ⁽²⁾. On 15 July 2020, the Commission adopted a communication on Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks ⁽³⁾.

The ECDC's epidemic intelligence spotted a cluster of pneumonia cases on 31 December 2019. ECDC issued a first Threat Assessment on 9 January 2020 ⁽⁴⁾, when 59 pneumonia cases were reported in Wuhan, possibly associated with a novel coronavirus. In January/February 2020, ECDC increased its internal emergency response system to the highest level, and published 14 risk assessments ⁽⁵⁾. ECDC has no mandate to issue formal warnings. ECDC informs the Commission and Member States on a continuous, weekly basis ⁽⁶⁾.

The Commission has produced guidance in order to improve coordination between the Member States in relation to border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and services ⁽⁷⁾. Recent events have shown the need for further strengthening such coordination.

Following the proposal of the Commission, on 13 October 2020, EU ministers reached an agreement that will provide more clarity and predictability on measures that restrict free movement due to the coronavirus pandemic ⁽⁸⁾. A common map with common colour codes based on common criteria, produced by ECDC, is the first important outcome.

⁽¹⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/health/hsc_covid19_en

⁽²⁾ The system enables health professionals across the EU to exchange knowledge, discuss cases and improve training via webinars https://ec.europa.eu/health/ern/covid-19_en

⁽³⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/communication-short-term-eu-health-preparedness-future-covid-19-outbreaks_en

⁽⁴⁾ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Threat-assessment-Pneumonia-cases-possibly-associated-to-a-novel-coronavirus-in-Wuhan-China.pdf>

⁽⁵⁾ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/threats-and-outbreaks/reports-and-data/risk-assessments>

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/threats-and-outbreaks/reports-and-data/weekly-threats>

⁽⁷⁾ C(2020) 1753 final COVID-19 Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services. 16 March 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200316_covid-19-guidelines-for-border-management.pdf

⁽⁸⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_1871