EU action: research on Covid-19 vaccines and cures

As the world struggles to contain the coronavirus pandemic, the EU is supporting efforts to develop vaccines and effective treatments as soon as possible.

The EU has come up with a coordinated response to help tackle the current crisis. Funding research and innovation projects to find a cure for Covid-19 is a vital part of that plan.

The EU and its member states are cooperating closely in the race to find safe and effective vaccines to counter the spread of Covid-19. The focus is on developing a prophylactic vaccine to prevent the disease and a therapeutic vaccine for treatment. Accelerated regulatory procedures are being put in place so that safe, effective and high-quality medicines can be put on the market as soon as possible.

MEPs discussed how the EU can boost the development of a coronavirus vaccine and treatment with Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and the Croatian Presidency on 14 May. MEPs praised EU efforts to support research, but stressed the need to ensure widespread access to affordable medicines.

Tackling the current outbreak

The European Commission has allocated €48.25 million for 18 research projects within Horizon 2020, the EU’s framework programme for funding research.
The 151 research teams from across the EU and beyond that are participating in these projects are working on:

- improving preparedness and response to outbreaks by developing better monitoring systems to prevent and control the spread of the virus
- rapid point-of-care diagnostic tests, enabling quicker and more accurate diagnosis
- new treatments
- developing new vaccines

Research teams will share their results in an effort to speed up the public health response.

The Commission also called for research proposals by the end of March focusing on developing treatments and diagnostics to tackle the current outbreak and increase preparedness for future. It falls within the framework of the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a public-private partnership between the EU and the pharmaceutical industry, which is also funded through Horizon 2020. Eight large-scale projects were selected and the Commission increased its commitment to €72 million, up from the previously planned €45 million, while €45 million will be provided by the pharmaceutical industry.

On 16 March, the Commission provided financial support to the tune of €80 million to CureVac, an innovative vaccine developer in Germany, to support work on the coronavirus vaccine. This support will also come from Horizon 2020, in the form of an EU guarantee of a currently assessed EIB loan of an identical amount.

On 19 May, the Commission announced it had mobilised another €122 million from Horizon 2020 for research into the coronavirus. Funding will be used to repurpose manufacturing for the rapid production of vital medical supplies, testing, treatment and prevention equipment, as well as to develop medical technologies and digital tools improving detection, surveillance and patient care.

Check out our timeline of EU measures to fight Covid-19 and its impact

Programmes already in place

The EU’s already had a number of research and emergency funding mechanisms in place to deal with public health crises, which have been mobilised. They include, among others, Prepare, a project supporting the readiness of hospitals in Europe and enhancing their understanding of the dynamics of the outbreak, and the European Virus Archive, a virtual collection of viruses that provides material to researchers to help in diagnoses.

The EU is also supporting start-ups and small firms in developing technology that could be helpful in tackling the outbreak, including EpiShuttle, a project for specialised isolation units, and m-Tap, air filtration technology to remove viral particles.

During the plenary debate on 14 May, Schinas said that the Commission is working on a new EU pharmaceutical strategy to make the EU more resilient in the future that will draw lessons
from the current crisis. The strategy should be presented later this year.

*Read more about the measures taken by the EU to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.*

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- European Commission research projects on coronavirus
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- Press release: Parliament to allow Covid-19 vaccines to be developed more quickly (10 July 2020)