

ERS submission to the European Commission's proposal on a reinforced mandate for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

The European Respiratory Society fully supports the European Commission's proposal to reinforce the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). The imperative to establish adequate surveillance, preparedness, early warning and response measures for future pandemics has been powerfully exemplified in this COVID-19 pandemic. ECDC can be a world class disease prevention and control centre and this proposal includes many elements to make the centre fit for the 21st century. The enhanced epidemiological surveillance, monitoring by digital platforms and applications will be particularly important in the new era of digital health and will help tackle all current and future serious respiratory disease threats.

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Its actions should be consistent with a One-Health approach, recognising the interconnections between human and animal health and the environment.

We fully agree. However, to be consistent with a one-health approach would entail a more ambitious approach to extending the mission and tasks of the ECDC. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for meaningful interconnections. For instance, there are many gaps in non-communicable disease epidemiology and ECDC is the most relevant Union body to close the gaps. At the moment, vital indicators on key diseases are missing, hampering collective progress in the EU. There is also a significant lack of comparable and sustainable data on the prevalence, incidence and other indicators of the main non-communicable diseases in the EU and neighbouring countries.

Operation of dedicated networks and networking activities (Article 5)

There is a strong link between infections and chronic respiratory diseases. COVID-19 is a particular threat for people with long-term respiratory conditions, who are at greater risk of serious disease and death if they become infected. Respiratory viruses also play an important

role in chronic lung diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, and cystic fibrosis, especially in disease exacerbations. Monitoring the risk factors of respiratory diseases, both communicable and chronic, and effective primary and secondary prevention of respiratory diseases could help mitigate COVID-19 related mortality. It would also be sensible to cover these interconnections for future health threats.

The ECDC already has powerful epidemiological surveillance systems and architecture in place that could support data collection efforts in non-communicable diseases, increase sustainability and efficiency of EU-level activities and complement national work. This would also greatly benefit the implementation of flagship initiatives of the EU such as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and to the realisation of a European Health Data Space.

The 2019 independent evaluation of ECDC highlighted the support from a wide range of stakeholders for the extension of the ECDC's work in the field, particularly in the areas of health promotion, information & monitoring, and health determinants. Moreover, the European Parliament in a resolution in July 2020 asked that ECDC be empowered to cover chronic diseases.

The opportunity for reform is now. We urge the European Commission to reassess and include further expansion of the ECDC mandate to include activities in the area of non-communicable diseases and provide the capacity to the ECDC to perform this mission. At the very least a small specialist unit should be set up.

Support to international and field response (Article 11a)

We welcome the proposal to create the EU Health Task Force. ERS believes that to provide sufficient support to governments, multidisciplinary teams of health professionals should be involved in the definition of the EU Health Task Force and the establishment of its procedures. Respiratory professionals have had essential roles in all aspects related to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and can provide valuable input in framing the EU Health Task Force for future outbreaks.