



Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Brussels, 6 March 2020

The Council session will start at **10.00** and will be chaired by **Vili Beroš**, minister for Health of Croatia.

Ministers will hold a public exchange of views on measures already taken with the aim of finding the best coordinated response to the effects of the changed situation regarding the COVID-19 outbreak in the EU.

Ministers will be joined by **Hans Kluge**, World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Director for Europe, **Andrea Ammon**, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and **Guido Rasi**, Executive Director of the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The European Commission will be represented by Commissioner for Health and Food Safety **Stella Kyriakides**, Commissioner for Crisis Management **Janez Lenarčič** and Commissioner for Internal Market **Thierry Breton**.

A **press conference** will be held around **13.00** (TBC) with Minister **Beroš** and Commissioner **Kyriakides**.

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[Press conferences and public events by video streaming:](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery:](#)

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

HEALTH

COVID-19 - exchange of views

Health ministers will hold a public exchange of views to take stock of the current situation with the aim of finding the best approach for continuing the coordinated response to the current COVID-19 outbreak in the EU.

The debate will be held on the basis of a presidency steering note ([Discussion paper](#)), containing the following questions:

- How do you assess existing mechanisms at EU level in view of the challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 in Europe? Could you suggest additional activities that would be helpful to further improve communication and information sharing?
- Bearing in mind the current pace of the spread of COVID-19 in the EU, how would you assess the effectiveness of measures currently in place in your country? Do you expect to focus less on prevention and preparedness measures in order to concentrate on treatment if the epidemiologic situation deteriorates?
- Would you assess measures already put in place by the Commission to give sufficient assistance to Member States if, despite measures undertaken, the spread of COVID-19 continues? Could you suggest additional activities that would be useful in helping your country in such situation?

The exchange of views will take place against the background of the significantly changed situation. When the previous extraordinary Health ministers meeting took place on 13 February, the total number of COVID-19 cases in the EU was around 40. Currently, there are more than 3500 in the Union. The sharp increase in the number of cases means that the majority of them are caused by transmission of the virus in local communities in the Union and are not imported.

The first cases of COVID-19 were reported in China at the end of December 2019. On 28 January 2020, the Croatian Presidency of the Council decided to activate the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements in information sharing mode². This triggered the production of awareness and analysis reports by the Commission and the European External Action Service and the sharing of information through a dedicated web platform. On 2 March 2020, the presidency switched the IPCR arrangements to full activation mode³. This allows the presidency to hold roundtables where participants (European Commission, EEAS, office of the President of the European Council, affected member states, third countries, EU agencies, international organisations) prepare, develop and update proposals for actions to be discussed and decided upon by the Council.

On 7 February, the presidency convened a high-level videoconference, where member states, along with representatives of the European Commission and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), had the opportunity to review the state of play and discuss matters of importance from a public health perspective concerning the COVID-19 outbreak. They also exchanged information on measures and activities undertaken and shared their experiences concerning the activation of national systems for handling public health emergencies.

² [Croatian presidency press release, 28 January 2020](#)

³ [Council press release, 2 March 2020](#)

On 13 February, the Croatian presidency convened an extraordinary Council meeting of Health ministers to take stock of the implications of the COVID-19 outbreak. Ministers discussed measures and activities undertaken and ways of strengthening the cooperation in the area of public health. They also adopted conclusions⁴ urging member states to take the necessary measures to provide information and guidance to persons who are at increased risk of carrying the virus causing COVID-19, to enhance cooperation and to continuously share information on the evolution of the virus within their territories. The Commission was called upon to assist the cooperation among member states, to examine ways to facilitate the access of member states to personal protective equipment and to evaluate the consequences of global health threats for the availability of medicines within the EU.

⁴ [Council conclusions on COVID-19, 13 February 2020](#)