



ECDC Weekly Policy Brief – 28 January 2021

Not for publication

# COVID-19 in EU/EEA

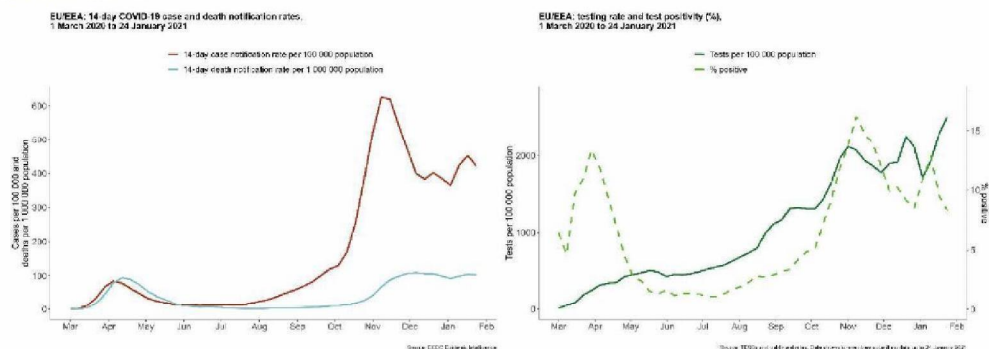
Reporting period: 18 - 24 January 2021

## Epidemiological summary

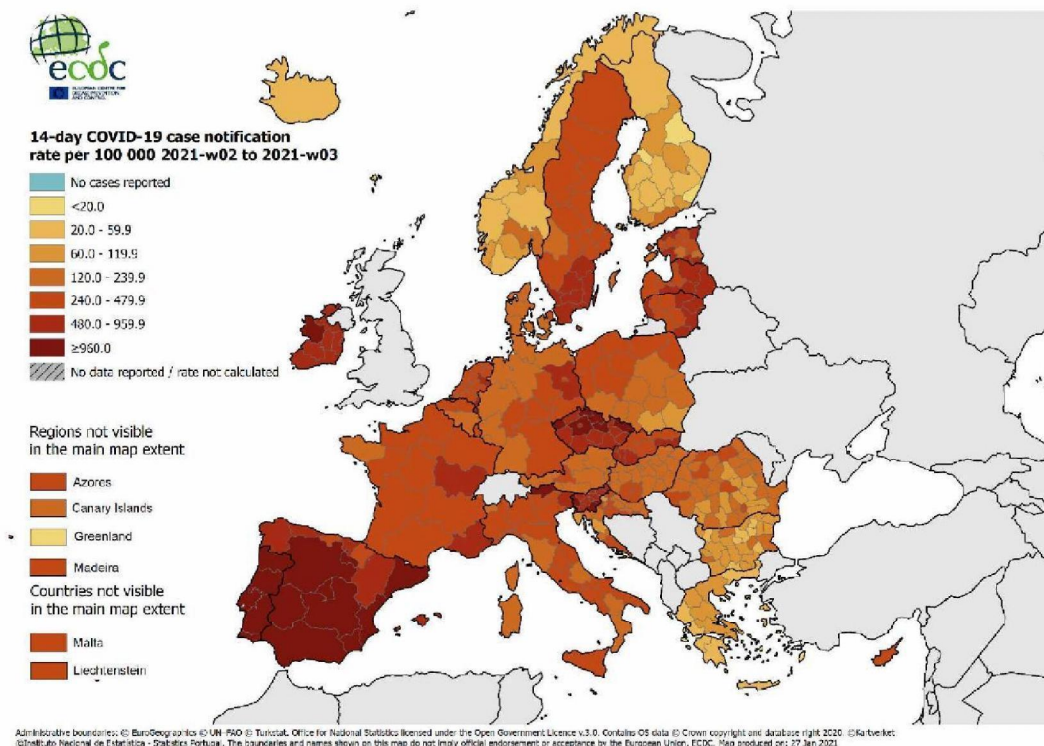
- During the reporting week, the **epidemiological situation was of serious concern in all EU/EEA countries except Iceland (stable)**, with high or increasing case notification rates observed among older age groups and/or high or increasing death rates across all population. Rates of hospital and ICU admissions, as well as the number of patients per capita in hospital and ICU due to COVID-19, remain very high, although recent stable or decreasing trends for these indicators continue to be observed in several countries.
- Among the 29 countries with an epidemiological situation of serious concern, **increasing trends of cases were reported in four countries (Finland, France, Portugal and Spain)**, compared to six countries in the previous report. **Stable or decreasing trends** of reported cases were observed in **25 countries**, compared to 24 countries in the last report.
- **Increasing case rates among older age groups or increasing death rates** were reported in **five countries** during the reporting week.
- Absolute values of these **indicators remain high**, even where they are stable or decreasing, suggesting that transmission remains widespread. Five countries (Belgium, Estonia, France, Ireland, and Portugal) continue to observe increases in hospital or ICU admissions and/or occupancy due to COVID-19. Considering the recent increase of cases in some of these countries, it is likely that hospital and ICU admissions will increase further in the coming weeks.
- **There is no indication that public health and physical distancing measures can be relaxed, even in countries with decreasing trends.**

## Key COVID-19 trends in Europe

### 1 March to 24 January: 14-day COVID-19 case and death notification rates, testing rate and test positivity trends



### 24 January: current 14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 population



## Epidemiological overview

- By 24 January 2021, the 14-day case notification rate for the EU/EEA was **421** (country range: 26–1 429) per 100 000 population, compared to 453 in the last report. The rate has been **decreasing for one week**. Nine countries (Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain) had notification rates higher than 500 per 100 000 population during the week of reporting, compared to 13 in the previous report.
- The 14-day COVID-19 death notification rate for the EU/EEA was **103.2** (country range: 0.0–247.6) per million population and remained stable compared to **103.6** in the previous report. Death notification rates above 50 per 1 000 000 population were reported by 23 countries, one less than in last week's report. Of these, 12 countries (Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia) had rates above 100 per 1 000 000 population.
- Testing rates in the EU/EEA as a whole continue to increase since the start of the year. Weekly testing rates for the reporting week were available for 29 countries and varied from 672 to 12 918 tests per 100 000 population. Austria had the highest testing rate for this week, followed by Denmark, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta. Austria reported a large increase in testing during the last two weeks as it started to report antigen tests apart from PCR tests. No testing data for the current week were available from Liechtenstein.
- Among 21 countries in which weekly test positivity was high (at least 3%), three countries (France, Lithuania and Poland) observed an increase in test positivity compared with the previous week. Test positivity remained stable or had decreased in 18 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden).
- Pooled ICU occupancy data from 20 countries show that there were 1.6 patients per 100 000 population in ICU due to COVID-19, which is **76%** of the peak ICU occupancy observed across these countries during the pandemic, compared to **74%** in the previous report.
- Pooled weekly ICU admissions based on data from 15 countries were 3.6 new admissions per 100 000 population, which is **42%** of the peak admissions rate to date, the same level as in the previous report.
- During the reporting week, all countries except Iceland had an epidemiological situation of serious concern. Among these countries, **stable or decreasing trends in reported cases were observed in 25 countries, compared to 24 in the last report. Increases were present in four countries (Finland, France, Portugal and Spain).**
- Transmission remains high in most countries, despite decreasing trends in some indicators. The epidemiological situation appears to be improving in the majority of countries, however a few other countries continue to see increasing numbers of cases, hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths. This serves as a reminder of the importance of **maintaining public health and physical distancing measures and that these measures should not be relaxed, even in countries with decreasing trends.**

A full table with all indicators and the assessment for each country is available in the annex.

## Hot topics

### New vaccines in the pipeline

The regulatory assessment by EMA of the vaccine developed by **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** is expected on 29 January. In a media interview this week, EMA Director Emer Cooke suggested that this vaccine may not be recommended in older adults. The data behind this statement is currently not in the public domain and more information is expected with the assessment. Data from the on-going phase 3 trial in the US and observational study data from the UK where this vaccine is authorised and used in older individuals, are forthcoming as well. Immunogenicity data published in 2020 suggest that older individuals respond well to the recommended 2-dose schedule.

**Sanofi** is planning to launch a phase 2b study with a new optimized candidate vaccine in February 2021. The study will include a proposed comparison with an authorized COVID-19 vaccine. If data are positive, a global phase 3 study could start in Q2 2021. If the vaccine meets clinical requirements on safety and efficacy, and once approved by regulatory authorities, a vaccine can be expected in the fourth quarter of 2021. Initial results from a phase 1/2 clinical trial of the adjuvant recombinant protein-based vaccine candidate by Sanofi showed good immune response in adults aged 18 to 49 years, but a low immune response in older adults.

### Impact of new SARS-CoV-2 variants on vaccine effectiveness

For the two SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa, investigations of neutralizing antibodies in convalescent sera are now available. Results for the UK variant suggest no impact on vaccine effectiveness, while the changes in the variant first isolated in South Africa may have an impact on vaccine effectiveness. For the variant identified in Brazil very limited data is available, but genome sequencing suggests that impact on vaccine effectiveness is expected.

With cross-immunity typically observed among similar viruses, the currently available vaccines are expected to offer some protection against new variants, although it may be shorter. In addition, investigations of T-cell immunity likely to be triggered by vaccines have been initiated both in the United Kingdom and South Africa. Meanwhile, all breakthrough infections following vaccination should be investigated including sequencing of the virus variant causing the infection and reported to both public health and regulatory authorities.

### Vaccines to be updated to cover new variants

Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna have announced that they are working with regulators on a process to update their vaccines to cover the new SARS-CoV-2 variants.

Moderna has announced its clinical strategy to develop booster vaccine candidates against the new variants first identified in the UK and South Africa. Moderna expects that its mRNA-based booster vaccine will be able to further boost neutralizing titers in combination with all of the leading vaccine candidates. It is important to understand whether a booster dose using the now licensed vaccine (mRNA 1273) or an updated vaccine containing e.g. the South African (mRNA.351) can provide protection against newer variants.

Neither Pfizer/BioNTech nor Moderna have announced development of vaccine candidates that could possibly trigger protection against the P1 strain identified in Brazil. It is likely that they are waiting for the on-going investigations of this variant.

## In focus

### **Monitoring vaccination deployment in the EU/EEA Member States**

The first phases of the vaccination campaigns in the EU/EEA continue and follow the national deployment plans. On 29 January ECDC plans to publish an 'Overview of the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment plans in the EU/EEA'. This upcoming report provides an updated overview of the progress of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout across EU/EEA countries, including new insights into some of the critical aspects and challenges in the implementation of national vaccination plans.

### **Vaccine tracker**

ECDC has implemented a monitoring system to collect information on vaccine roll-out (number of vaccine doses distributed and administered), and thus measure the evolution of vaccination efforts across the EU. WHO/Europe is also collaborating with the ECDC on this exercise, with a view to providing data for the entire WHO European Region.

The first data call was launched on 15 January for Member States to report two times a week. Member States have been invited to report as often as possible in order to provide the latest figures on vaccine distribution and administration. As of 27 January 2021, 20 EU/EEA countries reported complete or partial data on the roll-out of their national COVID-19 vaccination campaign to TESSy. ECDC is working with all countries to improve data quality and completeness. The Vaccine Tracker will be available online from 1 February and a weekly report will be launched next week.

## Recent and upcoming ECDC publications on COVID-19

- 1<sup>st</sup> update, Sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 technical guidance, 18 January
- ECDC rapid assessment of laboratory capacities related to COVID-19 (laboratory survey report), 18 January
- Rapid Risk Assessment - Risk related to spread of new SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern in the EU/EEA – first update, 21 January
- Update, EU/EEA deployment and vaccination plans for COVID-19 vaccines, 29 January
- Integrated COVID-19 response in the vaccination era, 1 February
- Launch of Vaccine Tracker on vaccines roll-out in the EU/EEA, beginning of February
- Stress-test on logistical aspects of COVID-19 vaccination deployment plans, 3-4 February
- 1<sup>st</sup> update, Guidelines for COVID-19 Testing and quarantine, of air travellers, Addendum to the Aviation Health Safety Protocol, February
- Detection and characterisation capability and capacity for SARS-CoV-2 variants (laboratory survey report), February

Publication dates for all upcoming ECDC reports are preliminary and subject to change.

## Annex:

### Criteria for epidemiological assessment

#### Epidemiological situation is 'concerning'

Countries with at least two of the following:

1. High ( $\geq 60/100\ 000$ ) or sustained increase<sup>1</sup> ( $\geq 1$  week) in 14-day case notification rates
2. High ( $\geq 3\%$ ) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in test positivity
3. High ( $\geq 60/100\ 000$ ) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in 14-day case notification rates in the older age groups (65+yr)
4. High ( $\geq 10/1\ 000\ 000$ ) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in 14-day death notification rates

#### Epidemiological situation is 'of serious concern'

Countries whose epidemiological situation is 'concerning' and which meet at least one of criteria 3-4.

#### Epidemiological situation 'stable'

Countries not meeting the criteria described above for 'concerning'

*Additionally, data on ICU and hospital admissions or occupancy due to COVID-19 are considered but not formally used as part of the assessment. The following provisional thresholds have been used in the table below, but these are subject to change as they are undergoing internal review within ECDC:*

- *High ( $\geq 25\%$  of the peak value during the pandemic) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in the rate of weekly hospital admissions due to COVID-19; and/or the 7-day mean hospital occupancy due to COVID-19*
- *High ( $\geq 25\%$  of the peak value during the pandemic) or sustained increase ( $\geq 1$  week) in the rate of weekly ICU admissions due to COVID-19; and/or the 7-day mean ICU occupancy due to COVID-19*

---

<sup>1</sup> Definitions of increases for each indicator can be found in <https://covid19-country-overviews.ecdc.europa.eu/>

## Key indicators and weekly trends per country as of 24 January 2021, EU/EEA

Indicators shown: 14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 population, 14-day COVID-19 death rate per 1 000 000 population, test positivity, testing rate per 100 000 population, age-specific case notification rate per 100 000 population for the age groups 65 years or older, weekly hospital and ICU admissions due to COVID-19 per 100 000 population, 7-day mean hospital and ICU occupancy due to COVID-19.

Notes: The Sparkline shows the evolution of the epidemic in each country in terms of the indicators shown since the beginning of March 2020. The colour of the entire Sparkline denotes the current trend in the indicator, based on a comparison of its most recent value with that seven days earlier.

- Red – sustained increasing trend;
- Grey – stable or decreasing trend;

Values in the column next to the Sparkline are the current value for the indicator. If no data are available for the current week then the value from the previous week is shown. If no data are available for the last two weeks then the value is left blank. Values that are considered high for the indicator, according to the criteria listed above, are shown in red.



Country	Assessment	Case rate		Death rate		Positivity (%)		Testing rate		6+yr		Hospital admissions		Hospital occupancy		ICU admissions		ICU occupancy	
		Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends	Value	Trends
Austria	Of serious concern	246.4		82.5		0.9		12,918		253.2		8.3		18.3		20.9		3.7	
Belgium	Of serious concern	252.6		62.1		4.9		2,691		248.2		44.9		16.9		4.4		3	
Bulgaria	Of serious concern	90.1		99.1		6.4		673		510.6		20.1		38.8		21.1		4.2	
Croatia	Of serious concern	216.6		111.9		11.2		858		268.3		9.8		58.2		17.2		10.1	
Cyprus	Of serious concern	304.5		43.4		2		5,953		908.8		96.9		13		2.2		4.2	
Czechia	Of serious concern	981.7		204.8		15.4		2,393		176.7		10.5		31.3		2.4		3.4	
Denmark	Of serious concern	216.5		71.1		0.7		12,858		24.1		16.1		38.5		2.5		4.3	
Estonia	Of serious concern	521.7		67.2		10.5		2,432		558		22.3		2.6		0.8		5.8	
Finland	Of serious concern	72.3		10.5		2.9		1,411		231.6		17		42		1.3		4.3	
France	Of serious concern	403.4		79.1		7.2		2,940		801.5		39.7		40.6		4		4	
Germany	Of serious concern	265.8		137.3		8.8		1,382		240.9		6.1		58.2		8.4		3.8	
Greece	Of serious concern	67.5		35.7		1.9		1,643		148.4		4.3		12.7		2.5		2.5	
Hungary	Of serious concern	171.5		132.9		7.8		1,008		313.5		7.3		9.8		1.4		3.9	
Ireland	Of serious concern	814.4		127.6		10.1		2,904		413.5		1.6		2.5		0.2		3.9	
Italy	Of serious concern	315.3		111.1		5.7		2,504		188		0.2		38.6		0.2		6.8	
Latvia	Of serious concern	595.8		136.5		7.6		3,651		1304.6		5.9		54.8		6.7		6.7	
Liechtenstein	Of serious concern	281.4		78.2		13.7		2,393		475.2		18.8		83.7		3.8		3.2	
Lithuania	Of serious concern	598.4		154.6		1.9		7,235		149.4		1.1		5.1		0		0	
Luxembourg	Of serious concern	280.2		50.5		4.8		4,702		313.5		7.3		9.8		1.4		3.9	
Malta	Of serious concern	472.5		40.5		10.5		1,966		41.2		1.6		2.5		0.2		6.8	
Netherlands	Of serious concern	431.4		67.5		1.7		2,614		188		0.2		38.6		0.2		6.8	
Norway	Of serious concern	105.3		13.1		13.8		749		866		24.5		57.1		4.9		8.9	
Poland	Of serious concern	231		108.9		17.7		4,374		245.1		5.9		54.8		6.7		6.7	
Portugal	Of serious concern	1429.4		247.6		10.4		866		827		33.4		56.2		4.9		8.9	
Romania	Of serious concern	202.4		57.5		16.7		1,387		889.9		57.1		56.2		4.9		8.9	
Slovakia	Of serious concern	513		194.7		13.2		3,159		827		33.4		56.2		4.9		8.9	
Slovenia	Of serious concern	885.5		208.6		13.2		3,159		827		33.4		56.2		4.9		8.9	
Spain	Of serious concern	1026.1		83.8		15.7		3,491		713.2		7.4		45.8		0.2		6.7	
Sweden	Of serious concern	483.6		38.7		11.5		1,963		316.4		22.1		1.1		1.1		3.2	
Iceland	Stable	25.8		0		0.3		2,028		5.9		1.1		5.1		0		0	