



ECDC Weekly Policy Brief – 18 March 2021

Not for publication

COVID-19 in EU/EEA

Reporting period: 8 - 14 March 2021

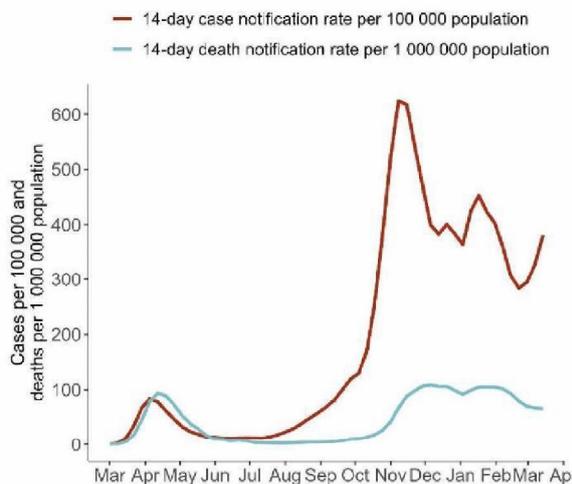
Epidemiological summary

- During the reporting week, the **epidemiological situation was of serious concern in all EU/EEA countries except Iceland and Liechtenstein (stable)**, with high or increasing case notification rates among older age groups and/or high or increasing death rates. 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 28 countries with an epidemiological situation of serious concern, **increasing trends of cases were reported in 19 countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden)**, compared to 17 countries in the previous report. **Stable or decreasing trends** of reported cases were observed **in nine countries**, compared to 10 countries in the last report.
- **Increasing case rates among older age groups or increasing death rates were reported in 11 countries** (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland and Romania) during the reporting week. **Fifteen countries** (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland and Slovenia) reported **increases in hospital or ICU admissions and/or occupancy** due to COVID-19.
- Absolute values of several **indicators remain high**, and the case notification rate has been **increasing for three weeks**, suggesting widespread and increasing transmission.
- **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

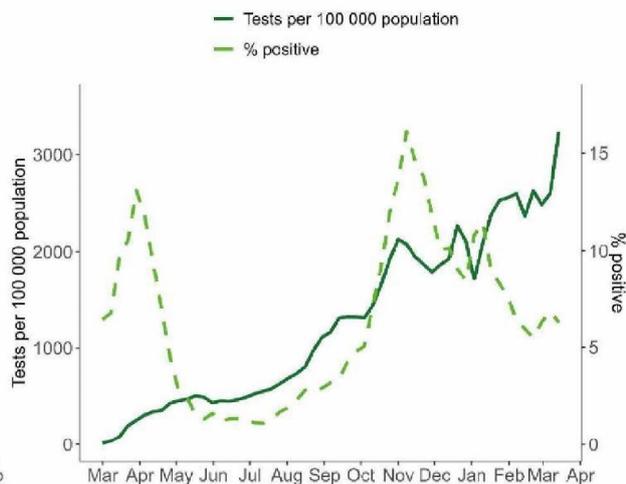
1 March 2020 to 14 March 2021: 14-day COVID-19 case and death notification rates, testing rate and test positivity trends

EU/EEA: 14-day COVID-19 case and death notification rates, 1 March 2020 to 14 March 2021



Source: ECDC Epidemic Intelligence

EU/EEA: testing rate and test positivity (%), 1 March 2020 to 14 March 2021

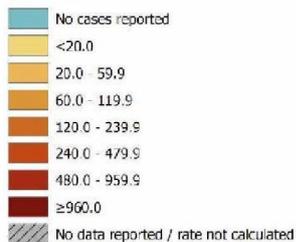


Source: TESSy and public websites. Data shown for countries submitting data up to 14 March 2021

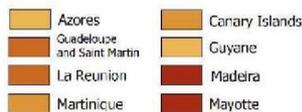
14 March 2021: current 14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 population



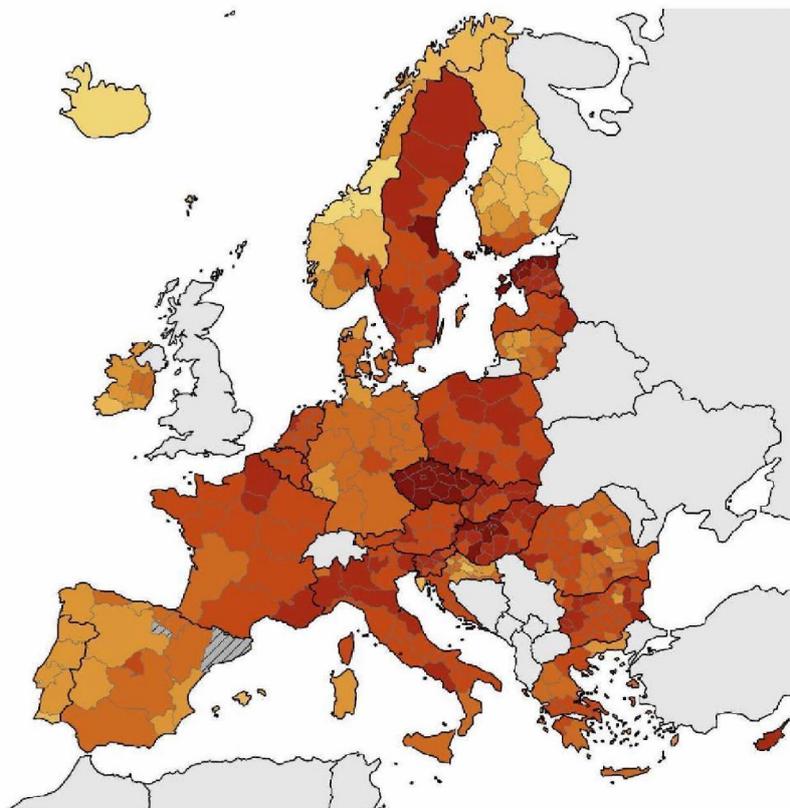
14-day COVID-19 case notification rate per 100 000 population 2021-w09 to 2021-w10



Regions not visible in the main map extent



Countries not visible in the main map extent



Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © IRI-PAO © Turkkial. Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2020. ©Ka-bretket ©Instituto Nacional de Estatística - Statistic Portugal. The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. ECDC. Map produced on 14 Mar 2021.

Weekly sequencing volume by country, 22 February to 7 March 2021, using data submitted to TESSy or the GISAID EpiCOV database by 16 March

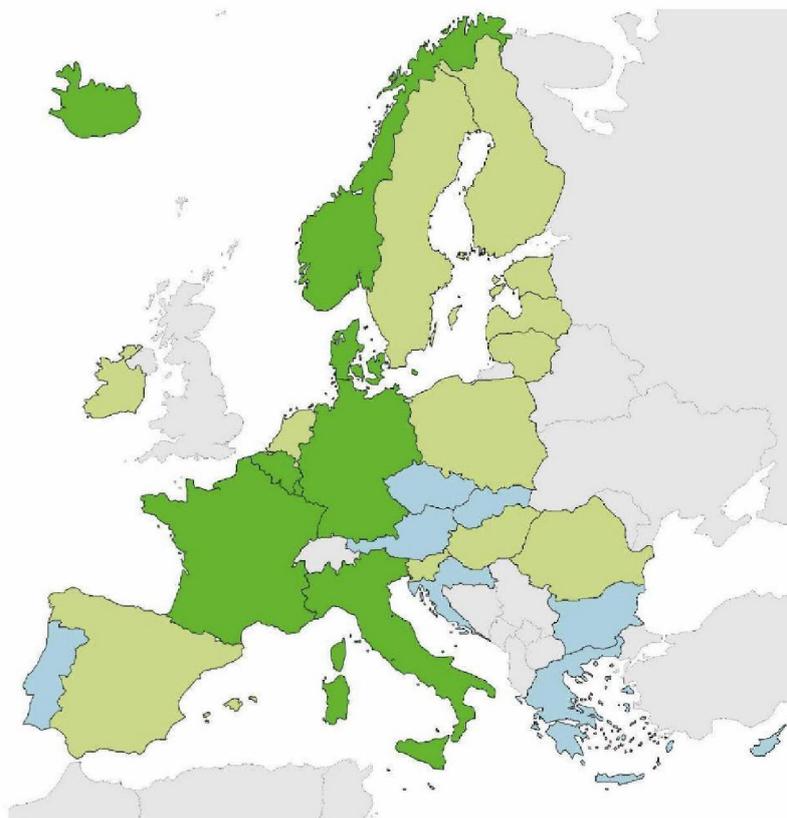


Number of samples sequenced weekly during weeks 2021-w08 to 2021-w09

- <60
- 60 - 499
- ≥ 500 or $\geq 10\%$ of total positive samples

Countries not visible in the main map extent

- Malta
- Liechtenstein
- Luxembourg



Sources: GISAID EpiCoV™ and ECDC TESSy data. Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics
The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union. ECDC. Map produced on: 18 Mar 2021

Epidemiological overview

- By 14 March 2021, the 14-day case notification rate for the EU/EEA was **381** (country range: 8–1 518) per 100 000 population, compared to 329 in the last report. The rate has been **increasing for three weeks**. Eight countries (Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden) had notification rates higher than 500 per 100 000 population during the week of reporting, an increase from seven countries in the previous report.
- The 14-day COVID-19 death notification rate for the EU/EEA was **65.7** (country range: 0.0–272.1) per million population, compared to 66.9 in the previous report and **remains stable** overall. Death notification rates above 50 per 1 000 000 population were reported by 16 countries, compared to 17 in last week's report. Of these, four countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia) had death rates above 100 per 1 000 000 population.
- Testing rates in the EU/EEA as a whole have continued to increase since the start of the year. Weekly testing rates for the reporting week were available for 29 countries and varied from 1 105 to 35 947 tests per 100 000 population. Cyprus had the highest testing rate for this week, followed by Denmark, Austria, Luxembourg and Slovenia.
- Among 21 countries with high weekly test positivity (at least 3%), eight countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland and Romania) observed an increase in test positivity compared with the previous week. Test positivity remained stable or had decreased in 13 countries (Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden).
- Pooled ICU occupancy data from 17 countries showed that there were **2.2 patients per 100 000 population in ICU** due to COVID-19, an increase from 2.1 in the previous report. Pooled weekly ICU admissions based on data from 12 countries were three new admissions per 100 000 population.
- Pooled hospital occupancy data from 23 countries showed that there were **11.3 patients per 100 000 population in hospital** due to COVID-19, compared to 10.4 in the previous report. Pooled weekly hospital admissions based on data from 17 countries showed 14 new admissions per 100 000 population.
- During the reporting week, all countries except Iceland and Liechtenstein had an epidemiological situation of serious concern. Among these countries, stable or decreasing trends in reported cases were observed in nine countries, compared to 10 in the last report. Increases were observed in 19 countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden), compared to 17 in last week's report.
- Sequencing capacity varies greatly across the EU/EEA; the rate of SARS-CoV-2-positive cases sequenced and reported to the GISAID EpiCoV database and TESSy by 16 March 2021 for the period from 22 February to 7 March 2021 met the recommended level of 10% or 500 sequences per week in eight EU/EEA countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg and Norway). During the same period, 12 countries sequenced and reported between 60 and 499 samples, while 10 countries sequenced and reported <60 samples or did not report data.
- Among eight countries with the recommended level of 10% or 500 sequences reported per week in the same period, the median proportion (range) of the variant in all samples sequenced in the period was 58.3% (35.2–80.4%) for B.1.1.7, 3.2% (0.1–17.3%) for B.1.351 and 0.0% (0.0–1.1%) for P.1.
- Variant B.1.1.7 is now the dominant variant in EU/EEA countries. Community transmission and outbreaks due to B.1.351 are reported, although some cases are also linked to travel. P.1 is still sporadic in the EU/EEA and most cases remain linked to travel, however community transmission is ongoing in some countries.
- Transmission remains high and is increasing in several countries, and despite stable or decreasing trends in some indicators, many countries continue to observe, or have started to observe, **new increases** in numbers of cases. In several countries this is also reflected in hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths. This underlines the importance of **maintaining public health and physical distancing measures**.

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

Hot topics

AstraZeneca vaccine on hold in many EU/EEA countries

Since 11 March, a growing number of Member States have temporarily paused or restricted the use of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca, overall or of a specific batch. As of 17 March, among those countries are Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. They did so as a precautionary measure while the EMA Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) investigates a number of adverse event reports of thromboembolic events including severe and fatal cerebral venous thrombosis in people who received this vaccine.

EMA has stressed in several press statements that the benefits of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca in preventing COVID-19 disease with its associated risk of hospitalisation and death, outweigh the risks. Also WHO has stated, on 17 March, that it considers the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine to outweigh its risks and recommends that vaccinations continue.

EMA is expected to announce the outcome of the investigation on Thursday 18 March.

In focus

Vaccination roll-out in the EU/EEA: key figures as of 14 March

- Total number of vaccine doses distributed by manufacturers: **64 147 371**

(29 countries reporting: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden)

- Number of vaccine doses distributed by manufacturers per hundred inhabitants: **median of 18.6 per hundred inhabitants (range: 8.1–27.2)**

(29 countries reporting: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden)

- Total number of vaccine doses administered: **51 657 789**

(All 30 countries reporting)

- Uptake of first vaccine dose among adults aged 18 years and above: **median of 9.8% (range: 4.9–18.3%)**

(All 30 countries reporting)

- Full vaccination uptake among adults aged 18 years and above: **median of 4.3% (range: 1–8.1%)**

(All 30 countries reporting)

- Uptake of first vaccine dose among persons aged 80 years and above: **median of 51.5% (range: 4.1–97%)**

(24 countries reporting: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden)

- Full vaccination uptake among persons aged 80 years and above: **median of 20.9% (range: <0.1%–65.3%)**

(24 countries reporting: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden)

- Uptake of first vaccine dose among healthcare workers: **median of 60% (range: 15.6–100%)**

(10 countries reporting: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, Spain)

- Full vaccination uptake among healthcare workers: **median of 44% (range: 12.5–96.9%)**

(10 countries reporting: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, Spain)

New version of the ECDC Vaccine Tracker released

An upgraded version of the ECDC Vaccine Tracker (V.3) was released on 16 March:

<https://gap.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab>.

This new version includes new and improved visualisations; trends in cumulative vaccine uptake (first dose and full vaccination) by country, in adults and target populations (80+ and HCW); key indicators and trends for EU/EEA (adults and by target population); EU/EEA country profiles with key vaccine rollout indicators; and downloadable data sets. The tab on "Doses by product" presents up to date information on the number of doses distributed and administered by vaccine product.

Introducing a coherent European framework for tuning COVID-19 response measures

On 17 March ECDC published a report on Introducing a coherent European framework for tuning COVID-19 response measures. The aim of this framework is to ensure efficiency and encourage public trust and compliance while continuing to protect the health of European citizens.

The framework is based on the concept of a 'contact budget', allowing Member States to estimate the extent to which the effective contact rate needs to change, or can be allowed to change, to achieve certain epidemiological tiers. Within the framework, estimates will be given for the effectiveness of various response measures, enabling Member States to choose the most suitable policies for their context. An interactive tool will be developed, supporting policymakers and allowing Member States to make use of their own epidemiological parameters.

Recent and upcoming ECDC publications on COVID-19

- Methods for detection and identification of SARS-CoV-2 variants (joint with WHO), 3 March
- COVID-19 quarantine and testing guidance for travellers, 12 March
- Stress test on logistical aspects of COVID-19 vaccination deployment plans with the Western Balkan partners: final report, 18 March
- Considerations on the use of self-tests for COVID-19 in the EU/EEA, 17 March
- Concept of framework for tuning non-pharmaceutical interventions, 17 March
- Vaccine deployment report update, 24-25 March
- Evidence base for risk of transmission from persons previously vaccinated, infected and seroconverted, technical report, March
- Risk of transmission following infection or vaccination, operational guide, March
- Technical report on framework for tuning NPIs, April

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 increase¹ (≥ 1 week) in 14-day case notification rates
2. High ($\geq 3\%$) or sustained increase (≥ 1 week) in test positivity
3. High ($\geq 60/100\ 000$) or sustained increase (≥ 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 (≥ 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 (≥ 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 (≥ 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*

¹ 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 14 March 2021, EU/EEA

Country	Assessment	Case rate		Death rate		Positivity (%)		Testing rate		65+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	388.3		28.6		1		20,559		215.9				14.3						3.8	
Belgium	Of serious concern	328.4		29.9		6.3		2,921		209.5		9.8		16.9						4	
Bulgaria	Of serious concern	433.4		137.4		19		1,381						91.4						7.2	
Croatia	Of serious concern	199.8		36.5		9.5		1,190		245.5		14.9		20							
Cyprus	Of serious concern	556.8		10.1		0.9		35,947		299.5		17.2		15		2.3				1.7	
Czechia	Of serious concern	1518.3		272.1		8		9,057		1091.6		135.1		83.5		27.6				18.5	
Denmark	Of serious concern	161.1		4.8		0.4		27,816		62.3		3.1		3.8						0.7	
Estonia	Of serious concern	1464.1		97.8		19.5		3,824						50.9						4.7	
Finland	Of serious concern	167.8		9		4.1		2,132		40.9				4.5						0.7	
France	Of serious concern	469.9		59.4		7.6		3,292				14.1		37.1				3.3		5.9	
Germany	Of serious concern	154.8		39.8		6.4		1,323		91.8		1.9									
Greece	Of serious concern	280.3		54.8		5.5		2,709		206.2								2.8			
Hungary	Of serious concern	934.2		207.3		24.1		2,353						86.6							
Ireland	Of serious concern	144		43.3		3.5		2,046		82.7		1.5		7.4		0.2				1.8	
Italy	Of serious concern	499.4		74.5		6.8		3,824		304.5		11.5		43.8						4.8	
Latvia	Of serious concern	398.1		78.1		3.8		4,766		308.6		18.7						6.7			
Lithuania	Of serious concern	223.5		56.2		6.4		1,811						27.1							
Luxembourg	Of serious concern	391.6		81.5		1.9		10,173		246.7				19.4						4.3	
Malta	Of serious concern	693.4		73.8		6.1		4,643		577.6		13						2.3			
Netherlands	Of serious concern	402.9		28.8		7.5		2,972		229.9		7.1		7.8		1.6				3.2	
Norway	Of serious concern	175.8		3.2		2.3		4,457		42.8		3		3.1		0.5					
Poland	Of serious concern	542.1		89.9		26.6		1,153		102.9		0.2		49.2							
Portugal	Of serious concern	92.8		33.3		2.6		1,534		0.2				11.1						2.7	
Romania	Of serious concern	303.1		60.1		15		1,105		293.1		49								6	
Slovakia	Of serious concern	532		244.6		19.5		1,332						66.5							
Slovenia	Of serious concern	489.3		51.1		2.4		9,816		333.7		12.8		22.3		2.6				4.2	
Spain	Of serious concern	146.6		59.5		4.8		1,487		76.6		1.8						0.1			
Sweden	Of serious concern	545.9		10.1		10.6		2,622		265.9				14.4		1.2				2.3	
Iceland	Stable	8		0		0.2		2,625						0.5							
Liechtenstein	Stable	302		0																	