

Meeting of the European Health Information Initiative (EHII)

Topic: Health Information in the context of COVID-19

20 May 2020 - Virtual meeting

Executive summary

The WHO Secretariat hosted a virtual meeting of the WHO European Health Information Initiative (EHII) Steering Group (SG) on 20 May 2020 focus on health information in the context of COVID-19. The meeting provided an opportunity to share updates from participants and the WHO Secretariat and partners on recent developments in the Region on health information in the context of COVID-19.

Introduction to the meeting

The WHO Secretariat hosted a virtual meeting of the EHII Steering Group (SG) on 20 May 2020. Dr Neville Calleja, Director of Health Information and Research at the Ministry for Energy and Health of Malta and Chair of the Small Countries Health Information Network (SCHIN), chaired the meeting. Ms Joanne McLaren, Secretary for the Health Information, Monitoring and Analysis (HMA) Unit of the Division of Country Health Policies and Systems (CPS), WHO, was appointed rapporteur and the provisional meeting agenda was adopted.

The main meeting opened with an address from Dr David Novillo, Programme Manager, Health Information, Monitoring and Analysis (HMA) in the Division of Country Health Policies and Systems (CPS).

Dr Novillo welcomed members and partners to this ad hoc virtual meeting and passed the Chair to Dr Neville Calleja who shared the amended Agenda and requested if anyone had anything to add. It was also confirmed that the meeting would be recorded. Dr Calleja then passed back to the WHO Secretariat to share any updates.

Updates from the WHO Secretariat, members & partners on recent developments

EHII updates from the WHO Secretariat, members & partners on recent developments in the Region on health information in the context of COVID-19

WHO Secretariat

David Novillo provided the following updates on behalf of the WHO Secretariat: The first is a non-COVID-19 related update to announce the new WHO Regional Director, Dr Hans Kluge, and his transition team who have been working on a new organigram, based on the following 3 pillars: Division of Country Health Policies and Systems (CPS), Division of Country Health Programmes (CHP), and Division of Country Support and Emergencies (CSE).

Everything related to Data Health Information and Evidence will be part of the CPS pillar. Dr Natasha Azzopardi Muscat has been appointed Director of CPS.

Information is currently not available regarding the work of the EHII network and the next steps/continuity, but updates will be shared as soon as possible.

David Novillo also noted that ongoing work for COVID-19 is wholly managed by the Incident Management Support Team (IMST), although some initiatives are managed by CPS, such as a technical document related to monitoring the wider effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on population health. The WHO Secretariat passed the floor to WHO consultant Dr Marieke Verschuuren to explain this document.

The aim of this document is to give guidance to Member States in monitoring the effects of the outbreak in the general population at a national or sub-national level. Should countries not be using specific indicators, references have been provided for them to use.

The Secretariat outlined the next steps for finalizing this document. CPS has been requested to lead this work at the global level and will be working with Dr Verschuuren on this. Further, CPS is working on the technical document in consideration for the application of data solutions for surveillance in the context of COVID-19. There is also a list of official apps that have been developed by the Member States to assist in the COVID-19 response, which can be made available to members. In addition, the WHO Secretariat is in conversation with social media networks such as Facebook to explore possibilities of having access to the data that they are collecting through a symptom survey they are piloting. This information can be provided to EHII members.

Updates provided by Eurostat, OECD and the European Commission (EC) regarding activities in relation to COVID-19

Update from Eurostat in the context of COVID-19 (Ms Ilze Burkevica, Statistical Officer, Eurostat, updated the SG on Eurostat's recent work in relation to COVID-19)

Eurostat is collaborating closely with WHO headquarters. Data collection documents are available on Eurostat's website in relation to COVID-19. There are now weekly as well as monthly data collections on deaths which 19 countries are taking part in, with more to join when the countries have more resources.

Update from the OECD in relation to COVID-19 (Mr David Morgan, Head of Health Accounts, OECD, updated the SG on the work of the OECD in relation to COVID-19)

An information hub has been put in place on the OECD website primarily looking at policy actions taking place in OECD countries. Looking at containment issues, vaccines, ad hoc data collections and structure indicators around beds, ICUs and ventilators to collate information. Using information from Eurostat looking at excess mortality.

Update from the European Commission in the context of COVID-19 (Mr Phillippe Roux, Head of the Country Knowledge and Scientific Committees Unit of DG SANTE, European Commission, updated the SG on the activities of the European Commission in relation to COVID-19)

There is sharing of information on COVID-19 between the European Commission and OECD. They have frozen a number of activities, however there is a discussion on a new health programme and a discussion on the possibility to have a consortium in relation to COVID-19 and this has been channeled to InfAct. They are working towards developing a more solid infrastructure to cope with crisis such as COVID-19, but also as previously discussed, climate change.

Updates from Member States (presentations on data related to COVID-19)

Dutch Public Health Foresight Study 2020 (PHFS) in the light of COVID-19

Dr Henk Hilderink, Top expert Population Health Foresight, National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), The Netherlands, provided an update on the PHFS in light of COVID-19.

EU Joint Action on Health Information

Dr Petronille Bogaert, Project Researcher, InfAct, Scientific Directorate Epidemiology and Public Health in Belgium provided a comprehensive presentation on current InfAct activities in light of COVID-19

COVID-19 specific health surveys in Belgium

On behalf of Sciensano, Dr Petronille Bogaert gave an update of health surveys in Belgium.

The Italian National Information System for the monitoring of COVID-19

Dr Patrizio Pezzotti, Department of Infectious Diseases, Italy, provided a presentation on the impact of COVID-19 on health information surveillance systems.

Conclusion

WHO Secretariat suggested that the countries meet every 2 weeks or once per month, for one hour, to discuss relevant topics for health information in the context of COVID-19. Topics can be emailed more informally to be discussed at these meetings. The WHO Secretariat and InfAct will discuss further so that they do not duplicate but rather can combine their efforts.

The Chair then closed the meeting.