COVID-19 situation in European region and selected countries

Key points from ECDC RRA 23/10, Wales, France, Italy

NPHET
29th October 2020
WHO overview of situation in Europe as of 25th Oct

- New cases and deaths reported in the European region increasing exponentially, with **36% and 37% increase in cases and deaths respectively** compared to the previous week.

- France accounted for the greatest number of new cases, over 200,000 cases, reported in the past 7 days.

- In the last week, hospitalisations due to COVID-19 and ICU occupancy increased in 21 countries across the region, compared to the previous week.

- Based on surveillance data reported, an estimated 18% of reported COVID-19 cases have been hospitalised, with 7% of hospitalised patients requiring ICU and/or respiratory support.

- In the UK, new cases have increased by 30% in the past week. The number of hospitalisations in Wales has sharply increased in the last week, increasing the pressure on frontline staff. There was also a steep increase in the number of ICU admissions among COVID-19 cases aged over 65 years old in England.

- Other countries reporting high hospitalisation rates include Czechia, where new deaths are currently the highest since the start of the pandemic and hospitals are expected to be at maximum capacity by mid-Nov, and Italy where hospitals in Milan are also stretched to capacity.

Source: WHO
ECDC rapid risk assessment 23/10 – key points

• The report highlights the worsening disease profile in most countries across the region, with the ECDC classifying the majority of countries in the region as experiencing an epidemiological situation of serious concern.

• In addition to the increasing incidence amongst younger age groups, the report also cites rising notification rates in older age groups.

• Test positivity has also been increasing in many countries since August pointing to a real increase in virus transmission rather than other factors such as increased testing.

• Pressure on healthcare services including critical care capacity in many countries also highlighted.

• Most EU/EEA countries and the UK have scaled up non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) to respond to increasing transmission - many of the measures implemented at national level relate to further restrictions on public and private gatherings, the use of face masks, and actions for international travellers including advice to avoid unnecessary travel and to quarantine upon return.

• RRA highlighted national stay-at-home recommendation in Ireland and pointed out similar strict NPI implemented in several other countries at regional or local level, reflecting high degree of heterogeneity at the sub-national level. Such measures include imposition of stay-at-home orders (incl. curfews) and cordon sanitaires, along with partial closure of non-essential shops and public spaces in countries such as Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and the UK.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU/EEA and the UK</th>
<th>Ranking by 14-day incidence</th>
<th>14-day cumulative number of COVID-19 cases per 100 000</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1448.7</td>
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<td>Belgium</td>
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<td>Estonia</td>
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Trends in 14 day incidence across EU-28 and UK (28 Oct 20)

Data as of 28/10/20 – ECDC
Trends in 7 day incidence across EU-28 and UK (28 Oct 20)

Data as of 28/10/20 – ECDC
France – epidemiological situation

• After passing the 1 million reported cases last week, France has now overtaken Spain as the country with the highest number of confirmed cases in Europe, according to data released by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on Sun 25/10.

• Numbers of new confirmed cases, confirmed cases in nursing homes, new hospitalisations and new intensive care admissions as well as deaths from COVID-19 are increasing significantly.

• Increasing cases in the over 65s. The number of patients in this age group admitted to hospital and to intensive care has increased five fold since the beginning of September.

• The hospital situation for COVID-19 in week 42 is approaching that observed during the first wave, after mid-March 2020, in terms of the number of people newly hospitalised, newly admitted to intensive care and the number of new deaths occurring in hospital.

• The spread of the epidemic in the spring is however slower than what had been observed at this period, the effective R was then around 2.5-3 while it is estimated at 1.39 in W42.

• In the spring, limited number of regions were predominantly affected (e.g. Ile-de-France). Now viral transmission is present across the entire territory of metropolitan France.

Source: Santé Publique France

Source: ECDC
France – measures introduced

- As of midnight 23rd Oct, **38 additional departments** and Polynesia will join Paris and its surrounding regions, Grenoble, Lille, Lyon, Aix Marseille, Saint-Etienne, Rouen, Montpellier and Toulouse in the 9pm-6am curfew – **total of 54 departments under curfew** for at least a four week period

- Over the weekend the National Assembly voted for the extension of the public health emergency until 16th Feb 2021

- The state’s new app, ‘Tous anti COVID’ went live on Thursday, which the government hopes, will strengthen the Alert pillar of their new ‘Test, Alert, Protect’ strategy.

Further restrictions are in force across France:

- Groups of more than 6 people in public places are forbidden
- No parties may be held in public community halls
- Venues may not host more than 5,000 people, and spacing rules must be observed: an empty seat between spectators or groups (of maximum six) of spectators
- In enclosed spaces open to the public individuals must wear a mask at all times.
- Local authorities may decide further restrictions. For example, in some cities and towns (including Paris) there may be a requirement to wear a mask when outside.

**On 28th Oct 2020, the President announced a “lockdown”,** strict rules will apply starting October 29th at midnight.
Wales – epidemiological situation

Epidemiological situation prior to introduction of fire breaker

- 7-day incidence 130/100000, R 1.1-1.4, increasing hospitalisations and death (Source: gov.wales)

- Epi considered by TAG when advising on “fire breaker” included that for the first time in this second wave of infections, the incidence for Wales measured higher than 100 cases per 100,000 people and the total test positivity for Wales was high at 11.9%.

- Most Welsh Local Authorities (LAs) were above 50 cases per 100,000 of the population. There was a similar picture for positivity, where all LAs were above 5% positivity.

Technical Advisory Group (not Welsh Govt policy) recommended fire break on 19/10 which was subsequently introduced on 23/10 by the Welsh Government for a two week period:

“Considering the current situation and the evidence from SAGE20 and TAG, it is recommended that a two-phase approach is used.

The first phase is a “fire-break” – a swift and short-term period of simple, extreme restrictions across the whole of Wales that would significantly reduce the prevalence of the virus in Wales. This would ease the pressure on the NHS and offer some time for a reset of behaviours and implementation of new healthcare pathways, health protection approaches or other interventions that require a runup. Doing it over half term would reduce financial and social harms. At least two weeks would be needed. If schools were to remain open, it would reduce short- and long-term harm, but most other workplaces would need to be closed and social visiting restricted in order to reduce overall contacts and break the chains of transmission.

The firebreak will have to reduce the national R (latest between 1.1-1.4) to below 0.9. This implies that R will need to be reduced in all areas of Wales, which requires a national approach rather than the current locally driven approach through Local Health Protection Areas (LPHAs)

The second phase is a new, simpler, national approach to behaviours and restrictions. Simpler messaging and regulations are expected to be easier to understand and comply with. Some existing restrictions may be removed if they are shown to be less effective or more harmful than originally expected, such as the Local Authority travel boundary restrictions. However, there would need to be sustainable changes in behaviour in many areas of life in order for Rt to remain as near to 1 as possible.”
Wales – measures introduced

Introduced “fire breaker” on Fri 23/10 for two week period

Measures include:

- People must stay at home excepted for limited reasons such as exercise
- Work from home wherever possible
- People must not visit other households or meet other people they do not live with either indoors and outdoors
- No gatherings will be allowed outdoors, such as Halloween or fireworks/Bonfire night or other organised activities
- All non-food retail, hospitality businesses, including cafes, restaurants and pubs (unless they provide take-away or delivery services), close contact services, such as hairdressers and beauticians, and events and tourism businesses, such as hotels must close
- Face coverings must be worn in indoor public spaces, which remain open, including on public transport and in taxis.

In addition, during this time:

- Adults living alone or single parents will be able to join with one other household for support
- Primary and special schools will re-open as normal after half-term
- Secondary schools will re-open after the half-term for children in years seven and eight and most vulnerable children. Pupils will be able to come in to take exams but other pupils will continue their learning from home for an extra week.
- Universities will provide a blend of in-person and online learning
- Childcare settings will stay open as normal
- Local parks, playgrounds and outdoor gyms will remain open.

Following the end of the firebreak, a new set of national rules will be introduced, covering how people can meet and how the public sector and businesses operate.
Italy – epidemiological situation

Ranked 16th out of 31 by 14-day incidence in European region - 330.2

Data from 12-18 October 2020 (reported 28th Oct)

A strong increase in cases continues to be observed, which brings the cumulative incidence in the last 14 days to 146.18 per 100,000 inhabitants (period 5/10-18/10) (vs. 75 per 100,000 inhabitants in the period 28/9-11/10).

The increase in cases is widespread throughout the country, with all Regions reporting an increase in the number of cases diagnosed compared to the previous week. This week, only one in four cases was detected through contact tracing activities, while 31.7% was detected through the appearance of symptoms.

In the period 01 - 14 October 2020, the Rt calculated on symptomatic cases was estimated to be equal to 1.50 (95%CI: 1.09 -1.75).

The epidemic is worsening rapidly with a higher rate of progression in some Italian Regions: Rt values above 1.25 are found in most Italian Regions

There is a rapid growth in incidence, increasingly impossible to keep track of all transmission chains and a rapid increase in the load on healthcare services, with an increase in hospital bed occupancy rates in both critical and non-critical areas.

Worsening epidemiological situation prompted an emergency session of the government at the weekend, resulting in a new decree announced nationwide on television by PM Conte.
Italy – measures introduced

New DPCM as of October 24, the decree includes new restrictive measures in force until November 24, 2020.

• Persons should not leave their homes unless for work, study, or health reasons, or situations of necessity, and should not invite people into their homes where not strictly necessary.

• Food services (bars, restaurants, etc.) now have limited opening hours from 5am to 6pm, with just four customers allowed to sit together, unless they are a cohabiting family group. Food and beverage consumption in public places or places open to the public is forbidden after 6pm, with the exception of hotel restaurants. Take away and home delivery services are allowed until midnight.

• Individual exercise outdoors observing 2m distance is still allowed, but contact sports as well as individual and collective sports events indoors and outdoors are suspended. Ski resorts are closed.

• Receptions following ceremonies such as weddings are no longer permitted.

• Amusement parks, gyms, swimming pools, wellness and thermal centres (with the exception of those providing health care services and sports clubhouses); cinemas, theatres, concert halls (including those outdoors); dancing halls and clubs; bingo halls, betting halls and casinos; cultural and recreational centres have now also been closed, until 24th November.

• Places of worship and museums remain open.

• High schools can adopt flexible forms of teaching including distance learning up to 75% of lessons and implement staggered entry hours from 9am.

Source: DFA 27/10/20 – EU MS COVID-19 responses summary
Conclusions

- Rapidly deteriorating disease profile across most of Europe
- Disease increasingly impacting older age group and driving hospitalisations, critical care admissions, and deaths
- Healthcare services in many European countries now coming under significant strain
- Increasingly severe restrictions being applied by many European countries in response to the deteriorating epidemiological situation – some heterogeneity in restrictions applied
Acknowledgements

Multiple contributors in DoH and DFA and relevant data sources as listed