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Health Brief: One big, healthy family

By Amalie Holmgaard Mersh and EURACTIV's Health Hub | EURACTIV.com

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As the new Czech presidency looks ahead to an Autumn with COVID-19 infections rising and big health files, they insist that more cooperation on health is the key rather than opening treaties to give Brussels more powers.

Fairly soon after the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) wrapped up, disappointment set in as it was clear that many of the citizens' wishes — [including on health](#) — would require treaty changes.

Immediately after the end of the conference, a coalition of [13 countries](#) co-signed [a document](#) declaring their opposition to any discussion about treaty change.

One of the signatories was Czechia which took over the presidency of the EU Council on 1 July.

And they stand by that signature, Czech health minister Vlastimil Válek [told EURACTIV](#).

Válek does see the point of working more closely together in certain areas



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regarding health, but the differences between countries make him hesitant to take too big steps.

"It's not so easy to answer. Europe is something like an extremely big family, with different children, different relatives, and so on," Válek said when asked about the Czech stance on giving more health powers to the EU.

"Generally, and as a doctor, I feel that each member of the family needs the same quality of health," Válek added, referring to his medical background.

But he also pointed out that, on the other hand, there are significant differences between the family members. "I hope we can start some discussion concerning this issue and talk about whether, after the Commission contracts for COVID-19 vaccines, it's time to discuss some future concerning other types of contracts," he said.

Generally, he is very positive about the contracts drawn up between the Commission and pharmaceutical companies ensuring EU citizens vaccines against COVID-19, calling the move "excellent."

"COVID taught us that it is possible and useful to cooperate. Such cooperation could have some purpose in the future related to some other issues," Válek said.

Yet, he argued that the current differences between EU countries make it difficult to align at the EU level.

"It's like football [and the big leagues]. Unfortunately, some countries never participate in this, and it is not so easy to qualify even if everybody believes in it in the future."

Moves towards closer cooperation

Even though many countries refuse to open up the treaty, it is widely understood that health threats cannot be dealt with alone as everyone is scrambling to learn lessons from the pandemic and find ways to revitalise Europe's health systems.

With the [European Health Union](#) initiatives promising better preparation and resilience at the EU level, the EU's health competences are stretched almost as far as they can be without infringing on member states.

Take the recent trilogue negotiations over the [file on serious cross-border threats to health](#), where member states tried to resist including the word "prevention" in the text, as they were afraid it might step on their competences.

Finally, member states decided to give in, as prevention is "key" to avoiding or better handling a crisis in the future, as the Parliament rapporteur, Véronique Trillet-Lenoir, put it after a provisional deal was made.

These moves towards closer cooperation are evidence of consensus that we could not have done without each other in handling the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"The current challenging situation has led us to analyse the impact of this crisis and to recognise that it was the solidarity, cooperation and coordination at cross-border and European levels that has been the determining factor in the effectiveness of the responses provided," wrote EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides and former French minister for health, Olivier Véran, in the foreword to a [Eurohealth report](#) on health-system resilience post-COVID.

An important Autumn of health

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So even though the pandemic may currently be at the back of people's minds, the Czech presidency is looking into an Autumn with big health files such as the particularly sensitive European Health Data Space (EHDS).

On top of that, COVID-19 infections are rising across the continent, and a solid response to the surge will be needed soon.

Just this week, the EU's health agencies recommended second booster doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines for those older than 60 and the clinically vulnerable to prevent hospitals from being overrun in the next wave of infections.

"I am aware that it requires a significant effort from public health authorities and society at large to achieve this goal. But now, at the beginning of a new wave, is the time to make the extra effort," said [Andrea Ammon](#), director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), on Monday (11 June).

Speaking to EURACTIV, Válek was clear that the Czech presidency will fully support the Commission in their work to secure contracts for COVID-19 vaccines adapted to the new variants.

"It is necessary to sign long-term contracts with companies and to offer the European population the best vaccines for all these mutations," Válek pointed out.

"COVID-19 will stay in Europe and the whole world, and I hope that any decisions on how to deal with the expected increase in the number of patients from September will be evidence-based and not purely political," he added.

By Amalie Holmgaard Mersh

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EU News

Czech presidency

Cancer screening, negotiations on long-term COVID-19 vaccine contracts, the European Health Data Space (but not all of it), and the care of Ukrainians [will be the main priorities of the Czech presidency when it comes to health, a Czech minister told EURACTIV.com](#) in an exclusive interview.

EURACTIV.cz reporters also [explored the main topics that will be touched on during the Czech EU presidency when it comes to the pharmaceutical sector.](#)

AMR

The European Health Union indicated antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as one of its top three priority health threats in the EU on Tuesday (12 July) – the same day as the World Health Organization (WHO) called for accelerating of development of AMR-related vaccines.

COVID-19

Second booster. As COVID-19 cases continue to spike across the EU, on Monday (11 July) EU health agencies recommended second booster doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines for those older than 60 and the clinically vulnerable. Following this decision on Tuesday (12 July) WHO also updated vaccination strategy for the autumn season, recommending a second booster to be administered for moderately and severely immunocompromised individuals aged five years and above and their close contacts, specific at-risk groups, including older adults, healthcare workers and pregnant women and advised co-administration of COVID-19 vaccines and seasonal influenza vaccines.

Unmet medical needs. Eurofund's e-survey, launched in April 2020, with five rounds completed at different stages during 2020, 2021 and 2022, found that a quarter of women (24%) report unmet medical needs. Unmet healthcare needs have increased across the EU, affecting almost one in five respondents (18%). The backlog in care is highest for hospital and specialist care with unmet mental healthcare.

Monkeypox

The European region has the highest numbers of monkeypox cases seen outside of the endemic countries. On 8 July, twenty-six European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries reported nearly 5000 monkeypox cases, representing 65% of all cases reported worldwide in 2022 in this outbreak in non-endemic countries, the ECDC announced on 8 July. On Tuesday (12 July), in the WHO press briefing, it was announced that there are 9200 cases in 63 countries worldwide. Health experts have requested preventative efforts be stepped up to prevent monkeypox from establishment in Europe.

Mysterious hepatitis

Between 5 April and 8 July 2022, 35 countries in five WHO Regions have reported 1010 probable cases of severe acute hepatitis of unknown aetiology in children and 22 deaths, WHO announced on Tuesday (12 July). Almost half of the possible cases have been reported from the WHO European Region: 21 countries reported 484 cases, including 272 cases coming from the UK.

Right to be forgotten

The right to be medically 'forgotten' – not forced to present one's medical history when taking out insurance or bank loans – currently exists in five EU states. EU lawmakers are calling for such a right to apply across the bloc.

Health systems

As global health systems begin to address the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly regarding backlogs and waiting times, experts have warned that simply returning to pre-pandemic levels of healthcare will not be enough.

Abortion

Following the US Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v Wade, MEPs have voted in

favour of a resolution calling for abortion to become a fundamental right in the EU – a request that adds to mounting calls for EU treaty change.

Pharmaceutical legislation

Despite an exceptional unity of intent during the pandemic, [the revision of the bloc's pharmaceutical legislation could suffer a bump between the EU's vision for health, and this is still conceived at the national level](#), Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen told EURACTIV.

Equitable expansion of genomics

WHO's [Science Council](#) of experts has issued its [first report, on accelerating access to genomics for global health](#). The report argues that it is not justifiable ethically or scientifically for less-resourced countries to gain access to such technologies long after rich countries do.

EMA news

Clinical trials analysis. EMA has launched a pilot project to assess whether the analysis of 'raw data' from clinical trials by regulatory authorities improves the evaluation of marketing authorisation applications (MAAs) for new medicines and post-authorisation applications and to explore the practical aspects of the submission and analysis of such data.

Emergency care. On 7 July 2022, EMA's Medicines Shortages Steering Group (MSSG) adopted the [list of the main therapeutic groups](#) of medicines used in emergency care, surgery and intensive care. The list forms the basis from which EMA will draw up concrete lists of critical medicines needed to deal with a specific 'public health emergency' or a 'major event'.

Minimising risk of meningioma. EMA's safety committee (PRAC) [has recommended new measures to minimise the risk of meningioma with medicines containing nomegestrol or chlormadinone](#), which are used for gynaecological and menstrual disorders, hormone replacement therapy and, at lower doses, as hormonal contraceptives.

From the capitals

PRISTINA

Kosovo's cafes, bars, restaurants must now provide tap water free of charge.

All cafes, bars and restaurants in Kosovo must now provide customers with [drinking water free of charge](#), following a government decision. By Alice Taylor | [exit.al](#)

PARIS

French health pass requirement angers overseas territories. [A health pass to be presented](#) on the borders between mainland France and other French territories, a requirement in a new bill aimed at defining the country's pandemic strategy following the end of the state of emergency on 1 July that is being looked at by lawmakers in the National Assembly, drew criticism from affected politicians. By Clara Bauer-Babef | [EURACTIV.fr](#)

EU, UK order 75 million COVID booster doses from Sanofi, GSK. Europeans could soon receive [boosters from French Sanofi](#) two years after the pandemic's start in the pharmaceutical giant's bid to rebound after the vaccine race fiasco. By Clara Bauer-Babef | [EURACTIV.fr](#)

ROME

Italy's COVID surge is 'real reason for concern', says health foundation.

Hospitalisations due to COVID-19 [have risen by 33%](#) in the past seven days driving a 36% increase in intensive care ward occupancy, according to the monitoring report by the Gimbe Foundation released on Thursday. By Margherita Montanari | EURACTIV.it

WARSAW

Polish medics fear new COVID wave. Polish experts fear [a recurrence of infections](#) and further lockdowns after several months of relative calm concerning coronavirus infections. By Bartosz Sieniawski | EURACTIV.pl

HELSINKI

Finland to offer fourth COVID booster to younger age groups. Those in younger age groups will start receiving the [fourth vaccination against COVID-19](#) starting mid-August if recommendations announced on Wednesday by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare are followed. By Pekka Vanttinen | EURACTIV.com

Monkeypox cases grow in Finland. Finland has confirmed ten monkeypox cases since Monday (4 July), all diagnosed in men. Globally, the number of cases since mid-May is around 5,200. The highest numbers have been reported in the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, France, Portugal and the United States. Cases have been reported in 51 countries. By Pekka Vanttinen | EURACTIV.com

Upcoming events

11-15 July | [UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.](#)

13-17 July | [European congress of radiology in Vienna.](#)

14 July | Expected unveiling of the new EU's tissue, blood, cells framework

14 July | [Healthy planet for healthy people](#) organised by the European Economic and Social Committee

17-20 July | [International Neurotrauma Symposium in Berlin.](#)

26-29 September | [European Health Forum Gastein](#)



Topics

conference on the Future of Europe /// Czech presidency ///
 European Health Union /// Health /// Vlastimil Válek

