



Coronavirus: Commission presents “Staying safe from COVID-19 during winter” strategy

Brussels, 2 December 2020

Today, the Commission adopted a [strategy](#) for sustainably managing the pandemic over the coming winter months, a period that can bring a risk of increased transmission of the virus owing to specific circumstances such as indoor gatherings. The strategy recommends continued vigilance and caution throughout the winter period and into 2021 when the roll out of safe and effective vaccines will occur. The Commission will then provide further guidance on a gradual and coordinated lifting of containment measures.

A coordinated EU-wide approach is key to provide clarity to people and avoid a resurgence of the virus linked to the end of year holidays. Any relaxation of measures should take into account the evolution of the epidemiological situation and sufficient capacity for testing, contact tracing and treating patients.

Vice-President for Promoting the European Way of Life, Margaritis **Schinias**, said: *“In these extremely difficult times, guidance to Member States to promote a common approach to the winter season and in particular on how to manage the end of the year period, is of vital importance. We need to curtail future outbreaks of infection in the EU. It is only through such a sustained management of the pandemic, that we will avoid new lockdowns and severe restrictions and overcome together.”*

Stella **Kyriakides**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said: *“Every 17 seconds a person loses their life due to COVID-19 in Europe. The situation may be stabilising, but it remains delicate. Like everything else this year, end of the year festivities will be different. We cannot jeopardise the efforts made by us all in the recent weeks and months. This year, saving lives must come before celebrations. But with vaccines on the horizon, there is also hope. All Member States must now be ready to start vaccination campaigns and roll-out vaccines as quickly as possible once a safe and effective vaccine is available.”*

Recommended control measures

The staying safe from COVID-19 during winter strategy recommends measures to keep the pandemic under control until vaccines are widely available. It focuses on:

- **Physical distancing and limiting social contacts**, key for the winter months including the holiday period. Measures should be targeted and based on the local epidemiological situation to limit their social and economic impact and increase their acceptance by people.
- **Testing and contact tracing**, essential for detecting clusters and breaking transmission. Most Member States now have national [contact tracing apps](#). The European Federated Gateway Server (EFGS) enables cross-border tracing.
- **Safe travel**, with a possible increase in travel over the end-of-year holidays requiring a coordinated approach. Transport infrastructure must be prepared and [quarantine requirements](#), which may take place when the epidemiological situation in the region of origin is worse than the destination, clearly communicated.
- **Healthcare capacity and personnel**: Business continuity plans for healthcare settings should be put in place to make sure COVID-19 outbreaks can be managed, and access to other treatments maintained. Joint procurement can address shortages of medical equipment.
- **Pandemic fatigue and mental health** are natural responses to the current situation. Member States should follow the World Health Organisation European Region's guidance on reinvigorating public support to address pandemic fatigue. Psychosocial support should be stepped up too.
- **National vaccination strategies**. The Commission stands ready to support Member States where necessary in the deployment of vaccines as per their [deployment and vaccination plans](#). A common EU approach to vaccination certificates is likely to reinforce the public health response in Member States and the trust of citizens in the vaccination effort.

Background

Today's strategy builds on previous recommendations such as the April European [roadmap](#) on the careful phasing out of containment measures, the July [Communication](#) on short-term preparedness and the October [Communication](#) on additional COVID-19 response measures. The first wave of the pandemic in Europe was successfully contained through strict measures, but relaxing them too fast over the summer led to a resurgence in autumn.

As long as a safe and effective vaccine is not available and a large part of the population not immunised, EU Member States must continue their efforts to mitigate the pandemic by following a coordinated approach as called for by the European Council.

Further recommendations will be presented in early 2021, to design a comprehensive COVID-19 control framework based on the knowledge and experience so far and the latest available scientific guidelines.

For More Information

[Communication on a 'Staying safe from COVID-19 during winter strategy'](#)

[Annex to the Communication](#)

[Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures](#)

[Short-term EU health preparedness for future COVID-19 outbreaks](#)

[Communication on additional COVID-19 response measures](#)

[Preparedness for COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment](#)

[Recommendation on the use of rapid antigen tests](#)

[EU interoperability gateway service on contact tracing and warning apps](#)

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