



## Coronavirus: a common path to Europe's safe re-opening

Brussels, 17 March 2021

Ahead of the meeting of European leaders on 25 March, the Commission is calling on Member States to prepare for a coordinated approach to a gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions when the epidemiological situation will allow. In a [Communication](#) adopted today, it charts the way ahead for a balanced policy and common EU approach, pointing to what we need to do to advance the time when we can recover our European way of life, and do so in a safe and sustainable way with control over the virus.

While the epidemiological situation requires continued control until a sufficient vaccination coverage is achieved, the conditions must be created across the Single Market to allow for safe and sustained re-opening, so that citizens can enjoy their rights and economic and social activity can resume. This includes the deployment of a Digital Green Certificate covering vaccination, testing and recovery; the use of a common framework for response measures; guidance on additional testing strategies, such as wastewater monitoring to track variants; investment in diagnostics and treatments. The Communication also highlights actions to build global resilience through COVAX and an EU vaccine sharing mechanism.

Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, Margaritis **Schinus**, said: *"The common path forward requires a safe and sustainable approach for the benefit of all Europeans. In lifting restrictions, we must learn the lessons of 2020 and avoid damaging and costly cycles of opening and closing. Today's Communication includes a balanced package of existing and new measures. We are looking forward to the endorsement of Member States at the upcoming European Council. Every day we get closer to achieving our vaccination goals and the recovery of our European way of life."*

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella **Kyriakides**, said: *"Today we are proposing a common EU approach that will lead us on the way to our goal of re-opening the EU in a safe, sustainable and predictable way. The situation with the virus in Europe is still very challenging and confidence in decisions taken are crucial. It is only through a joint approach that we can return safely to full free movement in the EU, based on transparent measures and full mutual confidence."*

Key steps and tools set out by the Commission:

### Digital Green Certificates

- Today, the Commission has [adopted](#) a legislative proposal establishing a common framework for a Digital Green Certificate covering vaccination, testing and recovery. This is an EU level approach to issuing, verifying and accepting certificates to facilitate free movement within the EU, based on a strict respect for non-discrimination and of the fundamental rights of EU citizens.
- A technical framework will be defined at EU level, to be put in place by mid-June, to ensure security, interoperability, as well as full compliance with personal data protection. It will also allow the possibility to extend to compatible certificates issued in third countries.

### A European framework for COVID-19 response measures

- The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is setting out a framework to help Member States take decisions on implementing restrictions. The approach will define tiers reflecting the epidemiological situation in each Member State. It will allow simulations to illustrate how much leeway each Member State has to reduce response measures without risking a reversal in the spread of the virus. An interactive digital tool developed by ECDC will be operational in April for use by Member States.

### Guidance to support additional testing and tracing strategies

- Self-tests for COVID-19 (both self-swabbing and self-testing kits) are now starting to enter the market. ECDC will publish today a technical guidance on COVID-19 self-tests, including details on their availability, their clinical performance compared to the "gold standard" RT-PCR tests,

their implications for reporting and epidemiological surveillance, and the settings for their appropriate use.

- The Commission is today adopting a [Recommendation](#) asking the Member States to put in place wastewater monitoring to track COVID-19 and its variants, share the data with competent health authorities for early detection of the presence of the virus, and identify clusters. It promotes the use of common methods for sampling, testing and data analysis, supported by a European exchange platform, and foresees respective financial support.
- Data exchange between Member States' contact tracing authorities can be particularly important when travellers are crossing borders in close proximity to each other, such as in airplanes or trains. Digital Passenger Locator Forms can be used by Member States to collect data from cross-border travellers entering their territory. In order for Member States to exchange relevant data through the exchange platform developed by the Commission and EASA, the Commission will publish draft measures establishing the necessary legal conditions for processing such personal data, to be adopted by the time of the summer travelling season.\*

### **Investment in treatments**

- A common EU strategy on therapeutics is planned for mid-April to speed up research and manufacturing to ensure quick access to valuable treatments. More flexible regulatory measures for therapeutics, such as labelling facilitations, will be deployed to enable rapid supply at large scale during the pandemic.

### **Helping the tourism and culture sectors to prepare for safe re-opening**

- In the tourism and hospitality sector, the Commission has asked the Standardisation Organisation, CEN, to develop, in cooperation with industry and Member States, a voluntary sanitary seal to be used by establishments. This deliverable will be available by summer.
- The Commission will promote EU cultural heritage sites and cultural routes, as well as cultural events and festivals, through an EU social media campaign on sustainable cultural tourism. New initiatives will be backed up when conditions allow through Erasmus+ and its DiscoverEU action to promote the discovery by young people of Europe's cultural heritage by rail, during and beyond the European Year of Rail.

### **EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism**

- A sustainable path out of the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU depends on progress at the global level. No country or region in the world will be safe from COVID-19 unless it is contained globally. The EU and its Member States are leading investment in the global COVAX Facility and are establishing a coordinated European approach to vaccine sharing by setting up an EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism to help partner countries overcome the pandemic. The European approach to vaccine sharing will help neighbouring and partner countries overcome the pandemic and comes on top of the €2.2 billion EU investment from Team Europe (Commission, Member States and EIB) in COVAX.

### **Next Steps**

The next months of the COVID-19 pandemic will require decisive action to ensure a sustainable and safe re-opening of our societies and economies. Coordinated action is needed at all levels to ensure that the next steps are as effective as possible in driving down the coronavirus, supporting citizens and businesses, and allowing our societies to return to a more normal situation. The EU set up a European bio-defence preparedness plan "HERA Incubator" against COVID-19 variants to bring together researchers, biotech companies, manufacturers, regulators and public authorities to monitor variants, exchange data and cooperate on adapting vaccines. Over the longer-term, the EU must also put in place a stronger framework for resilience and preparedness in the eventuality of future pandemics. This is already the objective of the proposals for a European Health Union.

The European Parliament and the Council should fast-track discussions, reach an agreement on the proposal for a Digital Green Certificate, and agree an approach to a safe opening based on a solid scientific framework. The European Commission will continue supporting the ramping up of vaccines production, and pursue technical solutions to increase interoperability of national systems to exchange data. Member States should accelerate vaccination programmes, ensure that temporary restrictions are proportionate and non-discriminatory, designate contact points to collaborate on wastewater surveillance and report on efforts made, and launch the technical implementation of the Digital Green Certificates in view of the fast-tracked adoption of the proposal.

In June 2021, upon request by the European Council, the European Commission will publish a paper on the lessons learnt from the pandemic and the way towards a more resilient future.

## More information

[Communication on a common path to a safe and sustained re-opening](#)

[Press release on Digital Green Certificates](#)

[Questions and answers on the Digital Green Certificates](#)

[Digital Green Certificate – Factsheet](#)

[Digital Green Certificates webpage](#)

[Proposal for a Digital Green Certificate](#)

[European Commission's coronavirus response website](#)

[Re-open EU](#)

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