

Long Term Care Covid-19 Commission Mtg.

Jonathan Suk (ECDC)
on Thursday, January 28, 2021



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1 LONG TERM CARE

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3 COVID-19 COMMISSION

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6 PRESENTATION BY JONATHAN SUK, PhD,
7 EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR, DISEASE PREVENTION.
8 AND CONTROL, (ECDC)

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15 --- This is the transcript of a virtual Zoom
16 meeting, taken by Neesons, a Veritext Company,
17 on the 28th day of January, 2021, commencing at
18 9:00 a.m.

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20
21 [All participants appearing virtually.]

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24 REPORTED BY: Helen Martineau, CSR

1 C O M M I S S I O N E R S:

2 The Honourable

3 Frank N. Marrocco Lead Commissioner

4 Dr. Jack Kitts Commissioner

5 Angela Coke Commissioner

6

7 P R E S E N T E R S:

8 Jonathan Suk (PhD)

9 European Centre for

10 Disease Prevention and

11 Control (ECDC)

12

13 P A R T I C I P A N T S:

14 Alison Drummond Assistant Deputy Minister

15 Long-Term Care Commission

16 Secretariat

17 Derek Lett Policy Director

18 Long-Term Care Commission

19 Secretariat

20 Alain Daoust Team Lead

21 Long-Term Care Commission

22 Secretariat

23 Rose Bianchini Senior Policy Analyst

24 Long-Term Care Commission

25 Secretariat

1	P A R T I C I P A N T S: (continued)	
2	Michael Finley	Counsel, Gowling WLG
3	John Callaghan	Co-Lead Commission Counsel
4		Gowling WLG
5	Lynn Mahoney	Counsel, Gowling WLG
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1 --- Upon commencing at 9:00 a.m.

2 JONATHAN SUK: Just by way of
3 introduction, my name is Jonathan Suk and my
4 role at ECDC is principal expert in preparedness
5 response. I'm not quite the head. So we have a
6 funny nomenclature for our job titles. So I
7 think it's -- it should be the equivalent to
8 senior expert. So there's a couple of principal
9 experts, which is always a bit troublesome for
10 native English speakers in the way that they've
11 named these posts.

12 But in any case, if I can show some
13 slides. I was asked to give some background,
14 contextual information, I believe, on our
15 perspective, both on pandemic preparedness, and
16 I have a bit of data to show you what's happened
17 in Europe at a broad level in long-term care
18 facilities in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

19 So I have two parts of the
20 presentation, if that's appropriate with the
21 Commissioners, then I can continue with that.

22 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: I think
23 we're fine with that. We're quite happy to
24 proceed the way you find efficient.

25 JOHN CALLAGHAN: You might keep your

1 voice up, Jonathan, because your voice goes down
2 a bit and the court reporter may have a hard
3 time hearing you. So just keep your voice up a
4 little bit, thanks.

5 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: Is there
6 a screen sharing issue?

7 JONATHAN SUK: Yes, sorry, I'm just
8 trying to find the file.

9 So in brief, European Centre for
10 Disease Prevention and Control, we're an agency
11 of the European Union and we're responsible for
12 having a broad data oversight, as it were, in
13 setting certain standards in disease
14 surveillance at the EU level.

15 Every country in Europe is responsible
16 for their own response, so we provide technical
17 input and support to EU member states and other
18 stakeholders, but -- and we provide outbreak
19 support and things like that.

20 Our core functions are surveillance,
21 microbiology preparedness, country support
22 scientific advice, training, communication and
23 epidemic intelligence and outbreak response.

24 And a lot of the data that you will
25 see from ECDC is compiled for daily epidemic

1 intelligence, and of course we're very plugged
2 in with WHO and all the countries in Europe.
3 And we're constantly screening the world for all
4 sorts of news of different outbreaks.

5 And then we have a range of disease
6 programs which is less relevant for today. We
7 have a new program, of course, on respiratory
8 diseases and Corona viruses.

9 So this is what an EU agency, just in
10 case you hear the name. So you might hear
11 European Medicines Agency in the news because
12 they're responsible for vetting the vaccines
13 that will be coming online in the EU.

14 We have partner agencies such as the
15 European Food Safety Agency and Karma [ph],
16 there's the European Environmental Agency.
17 There's the occupational safety agencies. And
18 so in some cases, we do a lot of work together,
19 so there's some overlaps with the occupational
20 safety agencies. There's overlap and a lot of
21 collaboration with EFSA in the area of food
22 borne disease. And with the European Medicines
23 Agency, of course, with the vaccines and vaccine
24 effectiveness, vaccine safety, and things like
25 that. So there's a lot of collaboration across

1 these ones.

2 That's just to give you a bit of a
3 background, just so you know, in general we've
4 been incredibly busy, as everyone has been
5 during the pandemic. We have a massive amount
6 of data and technical reports, risk assessments
7 on a wide range of topics that are available on
8 our website. I'm not going to go into those
9 here, but just to let you know that they exist
10 and that they are here.

11 In terms of the rapid risk
12 assessments, we have a formal process for this.
13 It's when something is changed, there's a novel
14 threat or the scope of the threat has changed or
15 the response measures appear to be less or more
16 effective, but something has changed in the risk
17 equilibrium and so then we do rapid risk
18 assessments. They're not actually that rapid.
19 They're very extensive. They're produced by a
20 lot of people. The first one we did was on the
21 17th of January, a year ago. And the most
22 recent one came out on the new variants of
23 concern and that was on the 21st of January this
24 year. So we are continually monitoring and
25 producing them.

1 And as I'll get to it later, we have
2 also rapid risk assessment on COVID-19 in
3 long-term care facilities in the EU and the
4 European economic area that I can present some
5 basic information on as well.

6 And we have a dashboard of all sorts
7 of data and indicators and we've been producing
8 all sorts of guidance documents and things. So
9 there you go, that's the background.

10 There's also a monitoring evaluation
11 framework for the COVID-19 response, which is
12 something similar to what World Health
13 Organization has to have, designated pillars for
14 the response and then sort of indicators under
15 each of these pillars of what should be
16 happening or what would be a best practice for
17 happening.

18 In the way that we viewed it, we had
19 country level co-ordination, risk communication
20 and community engagement, surveillance, vaccine
21 monitoring, testing, policy and practice,
22 infection prevention and control, case
23 management and maintaining essential health
24 services.

25 And of course, you can see that all of

1 these cut across the issue of long-term care
2 facilities, but they cut across basically all
3 the dimensions of the COVID-19 response, and
4 they're all very important pillars.

5 Just to step back now, and I'll just
6 give you a few slides on the perspective that we
7 have for pandemic preparedness in general. And
8 that's a story that starts of course prior to
9 COVID-19, but COVID-19 is definitely a paradigm
10 shift and a game changer for the scale and the
11 magnitude of what we need to be doing.

12 We're based in a situation where we
13 have the EU, so there's EU legislation, there's
14 international legislation, namely the
15 International Health Regulations, there's global
16 processes, like the UNISDR Sendai framework for
17 disaster risk reduction.

18 We try to pay attention to all of
19 these different mechanisms and that's sort of
20 what is shaping the way that we do our work.
21 And then of course at national level, which is
22 not my role, but in countries they will have
23 their national laws as well. So there's a lot
24 of levels of governance in the EU and we're
25 trying our best to harmonize these sorts of

1 activities and policy streams and so on.

2 In the wake of Ebola, there is a huge
3 emphasis on strengthening preparedness,
4 strengthening capacity relevant for
5 international health regulations.

6 And ECDC was quite actively involved
7 in that outbreak because we had a huge amount of
8 preparedness work to do, very hands-on
9 preparedness for what would happen if an
10 infected Ebola person came into the EU context.
11 And of course we did have that through medical
12 evacuations and so on. As well as we had a
13 fairly strong field presence in west Africa,
14 namely in Guinea, where there is a shortage of
15 French speaking field epidemiologists and so
16 ECDC was quite active in providing that.

17 So we were quite busy then, although
18 our main focus is the EU and there were all
19 sorts of evaluations afterwards, to think about
20 what that meant for preparedness going forward.

21 So there was a huge wake and momentum,
22 actually, behind the field of preparedness and
23 strengthening global health security prior even
24 to Ebola, but particularly after the west
25 African Ebola outbreak.

1 We also have our own particular
2 legislation on preparedness planning for the EU
3 level and this just gives an orientation, very
4 briefly, about what we do. And this is what the
5 European Commission is meant to do, but we play
6 a mediary role here in sharing best practice and
7 experiences; promoting the interruptibility of
8 planning because we have all these neighbouring
9 countries and, ideally, they would be in sync;
10 and, we have connections also to alert each
11 other about what sorts of measures are going to
12 be put in place.

13 It makes no sense if one country
14 closes the border and not the other and things
15 like that. So try to have as much as is
16 possible, an EU co-ordinated approach to
17 pandemic management.

18 And then supporting the implementation
19 of the core capacity requirements and that's
20 again from the International Health Regulations
21 and that has been a very large point of emphasis
22 in the last five years. This is just to give
23 you a feeling for how we view preparedness.

24 And again, we viewed into a few
25 things. So there's anticipation of threats,

1 there's the response and there's the recovery.
2 So this cycle on the outermost circle tries to
3 get into that, and then there's specific sorts
4 of things that we do in that.

5 So what we did when we produced this
6 is to try to understand basically what we were
7 doing at ECDC and what we would hope our
8 stakeholders would be doing and then to develop
9 projects and tools for each of these steps.

10 So the first one, of course, is
11 identifying and understanding risks; planning
12 various response strategies based on the
13 prioritized risks that you have developed and
14 identified; training and capacity building where
15 you feel that there are gaps in your risk
16 analyses.

17 And then what you have is a diversion.
18 You have either no real life event and then the
19 emphasis is on simulation exercises, drills,
20 table top exercises to test and see how well
21 your plans work in practice and to try to
22 identify gaps. Or if you have a real world
23 event, and then the emphasis is on the response
24 and then afterwards the emphasis is on the after
25 action reviews to promote learning and

1 optimization for the next time that there's an
2 event.

3 And all of that leads to this kind of
4 cycle process where it's a continual process of
5 quality improvement ideally. And that's the
6 sort of way that we view preparedness. And, in
7 brief, this also aligns with the WHO policy
8 stream pre-COVID, when there was time more to
9 think about these things where the priority
10 areas of action following the west Ebola
11 outbreak were accelerating country
12 implementation, improved monitoring and
13 evaluation of all of these IHR core capacities,
14 improved event management, strengthening WHO's
15 capacity to help countries to implement the
16 International Health Regulations and so on.

17 So we've been contributing a lot to
18 that.

19 And one --

20 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: Can I
21 interrupt for a minute?

22 JONATHAN SUK: Of course.

23 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: In terms
24 of Ebola being a trigger for preparedness, can
25 you place that in terms of years or when

1 approximately that realization --

2 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah, sure. So I mean,
3 the Ebola outbreak from 2014, 2015. And so in
4 the aftermath of that, in the years 2016, 2017,
5 2018, where there was the opportunity to do the
6 lessons learned in meetings and workshops and
7 discuss that in venues such as the World Health
8 Assembly and at the EU level, all sorts of
9 meetings to follow up and really emphasize the
10 need for enhanced health security.

11 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: And when
12 would the first publications of what you've just
13 been showing us, when would that be available to
14 people who were paying attention?

15 JONATHAN SUK: I mean, there were
16 already lessons learned emerging during the
17 Ebola crisis, of course, but there would have
18 been a lot more of them by around 2016.

19 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: Okay,
20 thank you.

21 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah, my pleasure.

22 So one of the things that happened and
23 I can't say that it's directly coming out of
24 Ebola, I don't work at WHO, but one of the
25 things that did emerge after Ebola was an

1 emphasis on other ways to assess implementation
2 of the International Health Regulations.

3 And one of these was the joint
4 external evaluations, which was a peer-reviewed
5 process to go into countries. And it was really
6 spare headed initially by the U.S., with a lot
7 of support from Finland and WHO headquarters, to
8 have peer review teams go into countries and in
9 a peer review kind of manner assess, at the
10 national level, usually with the national level
11 agencies, where they were on a wide range of
12 indicators.

13 And so I pulled out the one from
14 preparedness here just because it gives you a
15 feeling for the sorts of things that you're
16 looking for. And I've been on a couple of these
17 missions and led the discussions on that
18 chapter.

19 And so you're looking at, for example,
20 when you go to a country for preparedness, I'll
21 look at the -- as measured by a category here.
22 So the existence of national multi-hazard
23 emergency risk assessments, so that's risk
24 profiling, and that's also an IHR indicator, and
25 resource mapping. So we were looking to see

1 have you plotted out and identified the key
2 risks and have you mapped what resources exist
3 in relation to that?

4 Second, existence of multi-hazard
5 emergency response plans. So we're looking to
6 see what sort of plans they had for a range of
7 outbreaks. Of course we'd like to see pandemic
8 preparedness plans, usually the highest level
9 plan that countries would have. And then there
10 might be more specific ones to more country
11 dependent threats, maybe for vector borne
12 disease or so on.

13 And then evidence from exercises after
14 action reviews and so on, that there's processes
15 in place to review and evaluate.

16 So those are the things at the
17 national level that from the perspective of
18 emergency preparedness that we're interested in
19 helping countries to achieve. And that's been
20 sort of guiding, as well, the approaches that we
21 have taken.

22 There's a lot more detail in that
23 slide, but I can send you the link. These are
24 WHO reports that are easily accessible.

25 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: That

1 would be helpful, thanks.

2 JONATHAN SUK: Meanwhile at ECDC, we
3 have a framework, and again there's a lot of
4 text here, so I apologize about that, you don't
5 have to read the details. But we have a
6 framework for what we're trying to achieve. And
7 so the objectives at the end on the far right
8 are what we're trying to achieve. This was
9 published, I believe, in 2018.

10 The earliest possible identification
11 of any event, early and effective response, and
12 of course what you're trying to do is minimize
13 morbidity and mortality, limit the spread of
14 disease, minimize social disruption, and
15 minimize any sort of other damage. And the
16 earliest possible recovery and return to normal.

17 Now, COVID-19 is an order of magnitude
18 much larger than anything almost we could have
19 imagined and so all of those are much more
20 challenging than they would be for a routine, as
21 it were, outbreak.

22 And so going backwards then, these are
23 sorts of things that we have assessed that
24 should be in place.

25 The capacities capabilities is

1 interesting because a lot of the capacities are
2 about infrastructure or resources. You have a
3 stock pile or you don't, or you have a
4 governance framework or you don't. And that
5 varies, of course, very widely in the EU across
6 countries. Obviously everyone has a governance
7 framework, but some are more adept than others.
8 The economic measures and workforce, these sorts
9 of things are structural and very hard to deal
10 with in a short timeframe.

11 The capabilities are the mobilization
12 of these capacities, is the way to look at it,
13 that you can have a stockpile of face masks, but
14 if no one knows how to wear them and they put
15 them on their elbows, it's not very useful. So
16 the capability is the mobilization of the
17 capacities in a way that enables an effective
18 response.

19 And so we try to look at the things
20 that -- we're mostly focused on assessment at
21 ECDC under the response capabilities, but you
22 also have policy development and implementation,
23 the health services, which include medical surge
24 capacity, preventative services, the management
25 of your medical counter measures and stockpiles

1 and healthcare workers emergency responders.

2 And then a lot of communication and
3 co-ordination for health agencies involves a lot
4 of multi-sectoral co-operation and
5 communication.

6 Also the healthcare system in almost
7 every country is very diffuse. You have
8 hospital networks. You may have public and
9 private actors. You have the public health
10 agencies. You may be working with civil
11 protection agencies of a country. And then the
12 external communication to the public. So these
13 are consistently flagged as challenging areas
14 that we need to work more on.

15 So in the areas that are closest to
16 the ECDC mandate, we try to focus on those
17 topics and to help strengthen preparedness.

18 I realize that this is maybe a bit too
19 much detail for the purposes of your board, so
20 just let me know if it's irrelevant, I can just
21 skip forward. I don't need to spend all the
22 time if it's not a main focus to you.

23 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: We've
24 had -- we've touched on some of these things,
25 for example, the stockpiling of -- like we've

1 run across some of these problems, so it is
2 helpful.

3 But before you go on, the earliest
4 possible identification of the event, can you
5 help us with when a person who is paying
6 attention to these things should have figured
7 out that there was something going on?

8 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah, sure. I mean, so
9 at ECDC, the way that we do this is through
10 epidemic intelligence. We always have somebody
11 on duty for epidemic intelligence and we screen
12 a wide range of data sources. Some of those are
13 private and some of those are public.

14 And we knew that something was going
15 on over, you know, around New Year's Eve last
16 year. You know, I myself, who wasn't paying
17 attention because I was off, but I remember
18 seeing some Twitter notifications about a
19 mysterious pneumonia in China. And so then
20 there was -- we didn't know what it was. We
21 didn't know the details. But by the first week,
22 week and a half, in January, obviously everybody
23 knew that there was something pretty significant
24 that was happening. And the whole world was
25 really scrambling to try to figure out and

1 obtain more details about that.

2 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: Okay,
3 thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER KITTS: Can I just ask a
5 question about the report? Is there a guideline
6 or gold standard about how often these reports,
7 public health emergency preparedness, need to be
8 updated or refreshed?

9 JONATHAN SUK: No. A gold standard,
10 no. I mean, I don't think there's any strict
11 rule with that.

12 Pandemic plans, which are more
13 comprehensive, tend to, from our experience,
14 they tend to take some time to be revised,
15 usually because there's legal ramifications and
16 so on that might be part of that.

17 If you're talking about more routine
18 outbreaks, then maybe those are more regular.
19 So you're probably reviewing pretty often, you
20 know, food borne outbreak protocols or things
21 like that that are more standard. And they
22 almost become more like an SOP than an actual
23 pandemic plan in that sense.

24 But I don't think there's any golden
25 rule of thumb.

1 COMMISSIONER KITTS: Okay, thank you.

2 JONATHAN SUK: So then we try to
3 identify the risks and I often show this slide
4 prior to SARS because we tried to understand
5 where all these new diseases were coming from.
6 And two major things were that we've known for a
7 very long time that most of the new diseases are
8 coming through zoonosis, the animal-human
9 interface.

10 And, of course, noteworthy in this
11 slide is that two of the diseases are Corona
12 viruses, MERS and SARS, which, from Toronto, you
13 know very, very well. But there are many
14 others.

15 So we've also had a warning shot with
16 H1N1 pandemic, which turned out to be a "mild"
17 pandemic certainly compared to COVID-19, but was
18 also a warning of what might happen if something
19 was more substantial.

20 So we had done scenario analyses and
21 this is another way to look at things in terms
22 of the anticipation.

23 So one is to find threats through
24 epidemic intelligence through routine
25 surveillance, but for our planning, we have also

1 done a bit of foresight, a bit of scenario
2 analysis.

3 This was work that we did actually in
4 probably around 2010, it was published in 2011,
5 where we looked at different threat scenarios
6 that the EU might face. I flagged this one.
7 There were a lot of scenarios, and it's not that
8 we exactly knew that these were coming, but we
9 just tried to look at basic drivers of major
10 outbreaks and major challenges and tried to
11 figure out what would be pretty plausible, so
12 they weren't that far reaching.

13 But one actually was related to
14 increasing healthcare associated infections in
15 nursing homes just due to the demographic
16 trends, the challenges with antimicrobial
17 resistance in healthcare associated infections,
18 and the current setup or the then current setup
19 of the nursing homes.

20 And another one, of course, was
21 pandemic influenza. That was always and
22 probably has been for the last decade the
23 disease that pandemic plans would be based
24 around. And so we put here that the 29 (sic)
25 pandemic demonstrated even a relatively benign

1 pandemic can cause a fairly significant amount
2 of strain on health services, as well as cause
3 panic in unprepared societies.

4 So we tried with these types of
5 analyses to just put, you know, put people in
6 the future a little bit to try to then work
7 backyards and think, what do we need to do to
8 mitigate these types of scenarios?

9 So that's another approach that we've
10 been doing from time to time. It's not a core
11 aspect of ECDC work by any means, but I think,
12 you know, the current pandemic demonstrates that
13 we will have to do more of this going forward.

14 JOHN CALLAGHAN: If I might, those
15 articles are from 2011, right?

16 JONATHAN SUK: Yes.

17 JOHN CALLAGHAN: So you were aware
18 that countries were at risk of a pandemic,
19 certainly of an influenza, which would have an
20 adverse evident on the elderly and long-term
21 care, correct? That's what these two
22 articles --

23 JONATHAN SUK: That they certainly
24 would have the potential to have that impact, if
25 they were based on that. And then, of course,

1 depending on the setup of care and the
2 demographic structure of societies.

3 But, yes, I mean, pandemic influenza
4 and perhaps particularly in the field of
5 preparedness. I mean, most of the field of
6 preparedness in infectious disease derives from
7 in pandemic preparedness. They're quite
8 inseparable in many ways.

9 JOHN CALLAGHAN: If I could ask you,
10 if you could forward us those articles, that
11 would be helpful.

12 JONATHAN SUK: Of course. These are
13 open access.

14 JOHN CALLAGHAN: Oh, are they? Okay.

15 JONATHAN SUK: Yes, we can send you
16 the links to them.

17 So response strategies, one of the
18 things that we have actually been working on in
19 2018 was the concept of One Health preparedness.

20 And again here this is something that
21 we're just trying to -- I noted in our
22 legislation, I mean, one of the challenges for
23 us is the cross-sectoral collaboration. So we
24 tried to find ways where we could anchor our
25 work. And, of course, there was a big -- and

1 there is increasing after COVID-19, important
2 emphasis placed on One Health.

3 The WHO and the FAO and the OIE have a
4 tripartite process on One Health. And from our
5 perspective, we tried to look into that to see
6 what that might mean for the work we're doing
7 with our stakeholders.

8 And, of course, we understood here
9 that climate change, densities, trade travel are
10 really among the most important drivers of
11 infectious disease. And the point here that's
12 challenging for public health is that those
13 drivers of infectious disease, they fall outside
14 of the domain of the health sector.

15 So we don't have the mandate or power
16 to go and stop these processes and they're
17 globalization processes so they're not easy to
18 stop to begin with, but we try to draw the
19 recognition of that to emphasize the need to
20 work together, to improve the early warning that
21 we have, to try to go as upstream as possible to
22 deal with the risks.

23 And then we were looking at ways that,
24 based on this type of recognition, we could work
25 with actors in other sectors to try to develop

1 One Health related response strategies.

2 One of the examples that we have noted
3 in the EU during COVID-19 was related to the
4 stories you have certainly seen about new
5 variants of SARS-CoV-2 in mink populations, for
6 example, which is a good example of the need
7 from a One Health perspective.

8 And then afterwards what we've been
9 doing is this, also promoting a lot, and this is
10 an area that I personally work on a lot also is
11 the after-action reviews. The colleague in
12 office next to me is working on the simulation
13 exercises. And WHO has processes on these for
14 after-action reviews and simulation exercises
15 about trying to map out how these can be best
16 done to help countries in our -- of our
17 stakeholders, so EU member states, to implement
18 these.

19 And we usually hold on, an annual
20 basis, training on conducting simulation
21 exercises as well as some type of EU level table
22 top exercise to focus on. And it can be a
23 matter of co-ordination and the disease threat
24 can change based on these scenarios.

25 But that's a key part of the overall

1 cycle for preparedness is the improvement. And
2 as the after-action reviews and simulation
3 exercises is to test and to review and test and
4 review and constantly work to optimize. So that
5 is what we're trying to advocate to our
6 stakeholders over the years.

7 And during COVID-19, WHO also came out
8 with something similar to this that they call it
9 "interaction review". And we developed the
10 phrase "in-action review", which is just the
11 scale of COVID-19 is so massive, the response is
12 so long, it's so challenging for us that we felt
13 that there was a need also to try and promote
14 our stakeholders to do very brief, targeted
15 review during the response itself.

16 Because in -- the stakes are so high
17 and the duration is so long for COVID-19 that it
18 may not be practical to wait to the end to do
19 the full review. But maybe there's learning
20 opportunities during the actual pandemic itself.
21 And so we've been trying to push this.

22 I don't know how many countries have
23 actually found the time to do it. We are aware
24 of definitely some European countries that have
25 done this and we work together with WHO European

1 office to try to promote this as much as
2 possible.

3 But, you know, it's difficult, it's
4 difficult for us to even find time to do this
5 sort of thing because everybody is incredibly
6 busy, already running on fumes, but we are
7 trying to promote this approach. And then
8 afterwards, we'll be developing approaches for
9 wide scale, after-action reviews, but that will
10 not help the current response.

11 I don't know if you have any more
12 questions about pandemic preparedness, but
13 that's all I had for that. And I have a few
14 slides to present to you on the situation in the
15 EU from long-term care facilities.

16 JOHN CALLAGHAN: Can I ask, what's the
17 relative value to a general pandemic plan and
18 specific? You touched on it briefly that you
19 had said that certainly there would be specifics
20 for a region that might, you know, be
21 susceptible to seek a virus or something, but
22 what's the relative value between specific and
23 general?

24 JONATHAN SUK: That's a great
25 question. Something that we've debated

1 ourselves a lot is whether or not you should
2 have one all-hazard plan with different modules
3 for different diseases or one pandemic plan.

4 I mean, it's easy to say now, now I
5 know much more because we've seen what happens
6 with COVID-19. I think, you know, now the
7 answer is we need to push in the future for
8 plans that cover the really worst case scenario,
9 that are really -- cover for these really
10 existential threats to society.

11 And so for the -- a lot of the
12 diseases that we have preparedness plans for,
13 they're not as complex. It's -- Zika was really
14 challenging by the way, but for a lot of the
15 diseases, it's not as complex. As long as
16 there's a good plan and capacity's in place, I
17 would think that in the EU context, at least, we
18 can handle most of these outbreaks, but they can
19 still be challenging and disruptive, there's no
20 question about that.

21 COVID-19 demonstrates, and this is
22 what I'm saying now with hindsight, and not how
23 we were exactly thinking then, at least me
24 personally, we need to have the big pandemic
25 plans which are much broader in scope and touch

1 across many more sectors of government and
2 society because there are so many dimensions to
3 dealing with a pandemic. But that's probably
4 the difference and going forward that will
5 probably be a point of emphasis.

6 So I think in -- this is, by the way
7 some colleagues of mine, Pete Kinross, Carl
8 Suetens, Diamantis Plachouras, and Dominique
9 Monnet, who have a project, which is a
10 healthcare associated infection and also an
11 antimicrobial resistance. So that's been
12 traditionally grouped together at ECDC.

13 And they have been doing work on this
14 topic also prior to the pandemic, they have
15 observed that there's a fair amount of
16 healthcare acquired infections in long-term care
17 facility settings, so they have been trying to
18 promote measures such as infection prevention
19 and control and surveillance and so on and
20 trying to work on that topic. So it's not
21 something that has come up during the pandemic,
22 but they're already aware of this topic.

23 And so the data that I received from
24 them, and that's in our last risk assessment, I
25 mean, there are about 3.5 million people in the

1 EU across 62,000 in the long-term care
2 facilities and that represents about 0.7 percent
3 of the EU population.

4 There's a bit of a mixture, so the
5 definitions are not standardized, as far as I'm
6 aware, at the EU level. So they may include
7 nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities,
8 assisted living facilities, but also those
9 facilities that have very, very severely
10 challenging residents who might have dementia or
11 other co-morbidities and who are quite old and
12 are really in quite poor health. So there's a
13 range of that, so it's not a perfect
14 classification, perhaps.

15 One thing that came out in a policy
16 report that's also cited in, I think, in our
17 last rapid risk assessment, was that there was
18 already a known challenge in the EU as well for
19 access inadequacy challenge of the funding for
20 long-term care facilities, the quality challenge
21 and the demographic situation in the EU has made
22 that probably more pronounced. And employment
23 challenge, especially for women who are informal
24 carers, and then the financial sustainability
25 challenge relating to population aging and

1 increased public spending.

2 So these are recognized issues in
3 advance of the pandemic in the EU. And so I
4 would assume that this has parallels in other
5 parts of the world as well.

6 One thing that's important to know
7 that we have this surveillance, one thing that
8 is mandated to ECDC is the reporting of COVID-19
9 cases. And this is a database that has
10 absolutely millions of cases. So this data is
11 based on millions of reported cases to ECDC.

12 And it's up to, in this case, up to
13 17th of January. It's updated once a week on
14 our website. And what you can see here is that
15 there's a clear gradient, and you already know
16 this, clearly, through your Commission, that we
17 know that the elderly disproportionately suffer
18 from severe outcomes of COVID-19, whether that
19 be hospitalization rates, severe hospitalization
20 or accrued case fatality. And so that's what
21 you can see here in the columns where you have
22 the 80 plus and you see the highest number of
23 circles.

24 Another thing that we see, and I
25 apologize for the colours, you can blame my

1 colleagues back in the EU. But there's a
2 difference, and we still see it, this is again
3 up to last week, where the outcomes are
4 marginally and incrementally better since
5 around -- I'm not sure where this study's from,
6 but roughly around June, July are the two
7 different data sets.

8 I think that my Zoom window is
9 blocking my -- there we go, to the July 31st is
10 the blue and the green is after August 1st.

11 So what you see is that we are seeing
12 a lower severe outcome rate across basically all
13 age groups in the second -- so-called second
14 wave of the pandemic. And we don't have the
15 opportunity to go into that so much right now.

16 I mean, the assumption would be that
17 that's improved care, better understanding in
18 the clinical side of how to treat COVID
19 patients, but we see a clear trend, in any case.

20 JOHN CALLAGHAN: Can I ask you,
21 Jonathan, is the second wave perceived to last
22 longer than the first wave?

23 JONATHAN SUK: Well, when you add
24 perception to the --

25 JOHN CALLAGHAN: You're a scientist,

1 so I shouldn't say perception.

2 JONATHAN SUK: To me, perception seems
3 like, yes, lasting forever.

4 I think it's hard to say. I think
5 they've both been incredibly challenging, so I
6 really wouldn't know how to answer that. I'd
7 have to go back when we're out of it and really
8 be able to look into that and demarcate what it
9 is.

10 People have different opinions about
11 that as well. Between the waves or whether or
12 not it's just a question of the response
13 measures that we're tightening and loosening and
14 so on. Plus whatever seasonal effect that might
15 exist for the disease.

16 JOHN CALLAGHAN: In terms of lower
17 severe outcomes, is it possible that the virus
18 is more contagious but less severe?

19 JONATHAN SUK: It's possible. I'm not
20 a virologist, but I don't believe that that is
21 the main hypothesis.

22 And, of course, right now some of this
23 data will also include the new variants, which
24 we are know are more infectious, like the one
25 that's in the U.K. right now, and have taken a

1 foothold across many countries. And there is
2 some indications, but the data is very
3 preliminary, that that variant is also leading
4 to more severe outcomes. So the opposite is
5 also possible, but I think it's a bit early to
6 say.

7 And one thing that is lacking in terms
8 of just the capacity and the challenge of it is
9 that we -- you know, a very small percentage of
10 all the cases are sequenced so that we would
11 know exactly what strain these cases are coming
12 from.

13 And here you have a data, and this is
14 a real credit to the colleagues of mine because
15 this is hours and hours of work to put together
16 because there's no standard reporting yet in the
17 EU. But they have been monitoring, and this is
18 from the 14th of November, so I guess they do
19 this every couple of months to try to see what
20 data exists across the EU.

21 And you will see that in the reported
22 date per country that it's also quite variable,
23 just depending on when countries have published
24 their reports.

25 But the take-home message here is from

1 all the countries that we have found data on
2 that a fairly high proportion of the deaths in
3 the country have occurred at long-term care
4 facilities. So you'll see that the second
5 column to right. And this is on our website, so
6 the link is below, and there's a reference to
7 each of these data sources as well that have
8 been manually screened by colleagues at ECDC.

9 So you'll see that, I mean, you'll see
10 quite a few in the 40s. Norway 59 percent and
11 so on.

12 So it's a common trend and it's
13 certainly a common challenge across many of our
14 member states and that's recognized to be an
15 issue, I think, pretty universally in the EU.

16 COMMISSIONER KITTS: Could I just
17 clarify? The second-last column where
18 48 percent for Belgium, all those numbers,
19 that's the percent of all deaths that were in
20 long-term care homes? All deaths in the country
21 that would happen in long-term care homes?

22 JONATHAN SUK: That's right.

23 Now, there are going to be differences
24 depending on when these reporting dates are of
25 testing and so on.

1 So, for example, the data from
2 Stockholm on the 15th of April might be
3 over-represented, potentially, because there was
4 not as much testing happening widely. So we
5 have to take those caveats into account. But
6 based on what was reported at the time, those
7 were the percentages.

8 COMMISSIONER KITTS: So Spain was
9 72 percent of all deaths were elders in
10 long-term care homes.

11 JONATHAN SUK: Yes, exactly.

12 COMMISSIONER KITTS: Wow.

13 JOHN CALLAGHAN: Spain had 5,400
14 affected facilities. They must have very small
15 facilities.

16 COMMISSIONER KITTS: Well, if you go
17 back, Jonathan, if you could go back a couple of
18 slides, I think you've sort of defined what
19 long-term care is.

20 JONATHAN SUK: Exactly. So that's in
21 our rapid risk assessment as well. So it's a
22 broad category.

23 COMMISSIONER KITTS: It's -- see
24 ours -- if we were comparing apples-to-apples,
25 ours would probably be either nursing homes or

1 skilled nursing facilities. We don't include
2 retirement homes, assisted living, and
3 residential care. So there may be an
4 apples-to-apples concern.

5 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah, my assumption
6 would be that there is, that the nomenclature
7 probably varies.

8 And one thing that's also the case, I
9 mean, this is anecdotal and I can't give you
10 evidence on that, but the assumption is as well
11 that there is different cultural practices.
12 That in some countries, the elderly, they stay
13 with the family and they live with the family
14 and they're much more multi-generational. And
15 then other countries, it's much more their
16 facilities and it's really just nuclear families
17 who are living together and so on.

18 So there's probably this cultural
19 difference as well across the EU in terms of how
20 many people are living in these different types
21 of --

22 COMMISSIONER KITTS: I think there's
23 no doubt that across the world this virus really
24 picked on the elderly.

25 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah, yeah. The data

1 is very clear about that. And that's one thing
2 that I think has not really changed with time.
3 We've known that fairly early on and the data
4 has been pretty stable. So whereas so many
5 things have felt like they have been changing
6 very rapidly during this pandemic, and I think
7 the outcomes per age group have been one of the
8 clearest signals that we've had
9 epidemiologically.

10 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: It's the
11 same idea that at the beginning when people
12 first wake up to this in the beginning of
13 January, was it foreseeable, do you think, that
14 long-term care facilities would be particularly
15 at risk?

16 JONATHAN SUK: That's a very good
17 question. I don't have an answer for that. I
18 that in January -- I'd have to go back and see
19 what studies were out then, but from my
20 recollection, you may not have had enough
21 perfect information at that time about the
22 outcomes per age group and it was a new virus.
23 We just found out in early January that it was
24 related to SARS in some way, but we did not have
25 that detailed information as far as I can

1 recollect.

2 I mean, it could have been by
3 February, March that we would have had a clear
4 picture about that.

5 In the European context, when Italy
6 was hit, which was the first hard-hit country in
7 the EU, that's when we started to realize, you
8 know, at a more realistic tangible level how
9 serious the pandemic was and then we started to
10 get data, but again it was pretty chaotic at
11 that time with testing, with the reports that
12 were coming out. So it did take some time for
13 the full picture to emerge about what we were
14 dealing with and the characteristics and
15 epidemiology of it.

16 And so I had that table to show you
17 and the last thing I had here was a rapid risk
18 assessment from the 19th of November. So my
19 colleague described to me that from the signal
20 they did have, they felt that during the
21 so-called second wave there was another increase
22 of fatalities among the eldest age group, that
23 that was rising fairly steeply based on the
24 surveillance signal, which was a trigger to
25 discuss a rapid risk assessment.

1 And then so what we put here was that:

2 "Observed all cause mortality
3 among older people underlies the
4 severe impact of COVID-19 in this
5 group. Residents in long-term care
6 facilities are one of the most
7 vulnerable populations and particular
8 focus should be given to the
9 prevention of SARS-CoV-2 introduction
10 and to outbreak control in those
11 settings."

12 And we note the vulnerabilities of
13 those groups.

14 And then we have, which we do in all
15 of our rapid risk assessments, but I believe
16 this is the only one that we did specifically
17 focused on this setting, we reiterate messages
18 which we had surely put out before in other ways
19 of what should be done. So within the area of
20 long-term care facility management, what options
21 should be considered as good practice with
22 regard to testing, what should be considered
23 with regard to testing, what should be done to
24 minimize the risk of introduction into the
25 facilities.

1 And then we also had here to minimize
2 the risk of transmission within the centres
3 having been introduced and then considerations
4 for vaccination for seasonal and pneumococcal
5 vaccinations as well as potential considerations
6 for the vaccines for COVID-19, which at that
7 time were, you know, not yet approved but coming
8 online and we knew that they would be coming
9 online.

10 JOHN CALLAGHAN: If I could ask you,
11 there was an article that we looked at --

12 JONATHAN SUK: Please, go ahead.

13 JOHN CALLAGHAN: If there's something
14 else, go ahead.

15 JONATHAN SUK: No. I was just
16 actually checking what I had as the last slide,
17 but it was just a link to the website that we
18 have with all of the data on long-term care
19 facilities.

20 JOHN CALLAGHAN: I guess the one thing
21 is there were -- in an article we looked at in
22 preparation, there was some -- at least it was a
23 UK study, I believe, that identified areas of
24 concern, which I think are fairly well accepted.

25 For example, long-term care facilities

1 are at greater risk if there's a higher
2 prevalence of COVID in community. Is that one
3 of those things that has been fairly well
4 accepted?

5 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah. I think that's
6 just your basic logical premise.

7 I've been working a lot on the topic
8 of schools and that's also something that we see
9 that, of course, the likelihood of an outbreak
10 in a school setting or so on is pretty well
11 correlated to the background levels of community
12 transmission and we've seen that across many
13 different country settings.

14 JOHN CALLAGHAN: And things like
15 inadequate staff training of IPAC or working in
16 more than one facility has also been seen to
17 increase the risk of infection in the homes?

18 JONATHAN SUK: I mean, I don't have
19 empirical evidence that -- of studies that
20 tested the knowledge level of staff and
21 whatever, but of course, you know, these
22 practices, IPAC have to be practiced well to be
23 able to minimize the risks.

24 JOHN CALLAGHAN: I won't take you to
25 it. We have the article so we can rely on it.

1 And just last thing, are you aware of
2 many other Commissions like ours actually being
3 undertaken at this time as opposed to what might
4 be going on in the future?

5 JONATHAN SUK: At this time, no, I'm
6 not. So I was aware of a few in the EU setting
7 that I think have published reports, or interim
8 reports at least. And I know that there's a
9 global broad pandemic COVID-19 group that's
10 doing this, but in terms of Commissions like
11 this at the moment, I am not, no.

12 JOHN CALLAGHAN: Those would be my
13 questions, unless the Commissioners have
14 anything else?

15 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: No, I
16 don't think we do.

17 Mr. Suk, thank you very much for
18 putting this presentation together. We've been
19 trying to broaden our scope beyond Ontario and
20 beyond Canada to get a kind of a feel for the
21 landscape. And this sort of thing is very, very
22 important for what we're doing.

23 We're, I guess, in that situation
24 where we're in the middle of something and
25 trying to analyze it at the same time which, as

1 you can appreciate, can be quite challenging.

2 And like some of the Commissions too,
3 or some of the committees to which you referred,
4 we have put out two interim reports, primarily
5 for the same reason. We didn't want to be
6 reporting so long after the event that the whole
7 thing was over.

8 So this is very, very helpful to us
9 and thank you for helping out your fellow
10 Canadians in this project. It's very much
11 appreciated.

12 JONATHAN SUK: Yeah, no, it's my
13 pleasure to speak with people in Canada and to
14 help out where we can.

15 And, you know, this work that we're
16 doing, it's all publically available and I think
17 there's -- it's important that it's just a
18 question of knowing what's available sometimes
19 and where to find it. So happy to make that
20 easy for you.

21 LEAD COMMISSIONER MARROCCO: Thank you
22 very much.

23 --- Meeting ended at 9:52 a.m.

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, HELEN MARTINEAU, CSR, Certified
Shorthand Reporter, certify;

That the foregoing meeting was taken
before me at the time and date therein set
forth;

That all remarks made at the time
were recorded stenographically by me and were
thereafter transcribed;

That the foregoing is a true and
accurate transcript of my shorthand notes so
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PER: HELEN MARTINEAU
CERTIFIED SHORTHAND REPORTER

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