

Meeting Report - Extraordinary Meeting of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and National Network Coordinators

Thursday 19 March 2020 11:00-12:15

CET Online via WebEx

Purpose

The meeting was held in order to discuss and identify both the challenges faced by, and the specific needs of, cities across the WHO European Healthy Cities Network in the context of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of priority areas Notified priority areas from the meeting included:

- Mental Health
- Groups most at risk of vulnerability – in particularly the elderly and children
- Homelessness support and provision of shelters
- WHO and UNESCO to partner on sharing resources and linking the two networks to support the COVID-19 response

Summary of actions requested to WHO The following actions were requested of WHO from National Healthy Cities Networks and cities:

- Advocacy and communication
- Strengthening the knowledge and understanding of Ministers and Ministries of Health that WHO National Healthy Cities Networks are partners and resources for supporting national response efforts
- Development of communication and messaging targeting the local and city level directly – in particular, Infographics and communication aimed at the local level
- Information targeting private sector and Chambers of Trade and Commerce Knowledge and good practice
- Collation and sharing of examples on good practices of cities responding to COVID19, including on how to tackle and address the public health problems that will emerge locally
- Regular Network meetings to allow cities to share the evolution of the situation • WHO European Healthy Cities Network to partner with UNESCO learning cities to share global learning and experiences
- Sharing of good practices in COVID-19 response from other WHO regions globally
- The creation of an online platform for cities to share documents, guidance, and good practice examples among themselves Technical support

Technical guidance on:

- The disinfection of public spaces by municipalities
- Use of masks by general public
- How to behave in daily situations
- Loneliness
- Mental health impact of social distancing measures
- How to collect and present data to citizens

Summary from Cities

Austria, City of Vienna

The city of Vienna stated that the main concern in Austria and Vienna are the economic consequences, in particular the loss of jobs. Funding support has been established by the government in very short time the attempt to alleviate the consequences of this, including for short term and temporary workers.

In Vienna there almost a complete shutdown, and only shops deemed necessary for daily needs (foods, pharmacies etc.) are open. Schools and universities are closed and switched to distance learning. Public means of transport still function. It is allowed to go out to get supplies, to help others and to pursue important work.

The information policy of the federal government is effective, and the measures were implemented step by step so that people could adapt.

Ski resorts were identified as hot spots for the spread of the virus, and social distancing measures were implemented too late to limit the spread in these settings. Ski resorts are now closed and several communities including the whole province of the Tyrol are under quarantine measures.

Belgium, City of Brussels

The city of Brussels informed that in Belgium, cities are organizing support for people in need. Volunteers that want to help and people who need help can sign in on municipal websites to find each other, including in the city of Brussels.

In Belgium the measures started Friday 13 March. The intention is to slow down the number of infections, so that the health system can continue to care for all people that are dangerously ill.

Measures include: everybody is urged to stay indoors; everybody who can should work from home; all gatherings of people are forbidden; bars, restaurants and non-essential shops are closed. People are permitted to go out, but should practice social distancing. The people you can interact with is limited to your own household and maximum one other person for the duration of the crisis. These measures are in place until the 6th of April with potential for extension.

Croatia, City of Rijeka

The city of Rijeka informs that in Croatia all non-essential shops and services are closed, all events cancelled, people are advised to stay indoors and work from home if they can, social distancing is advised. Many smaller businesses are already having to cancel employee contracts with immediate effect and the economic consequences are a considerable concern across the country.

The national government has presented measures to help counter this, but the effectiveness and success of these measures is yet to be determined, especially for small and medium businesses.

The City of Rijeka (and most other local governments) have organized to provide delivery services to those who are in isolation and the groups who are 7 most at risk.

Mental health a priority area and emergency phone lines for people in crisis have been set up. To date, Croatia has 102 confirmed cases with 1 confirmed death. In the city of Rijeka in particular there are 14 confirmed cases to date.

Czech Republic, Czech National Healthy Cities Network

The Czech National Healthy Cities Network is connecting all of its member cities and providing advice on how to act from a public health perspective as well as giving legal advice to members free of charge regarding cities, as well as public and small businesses.

Cities are sharing their good practice in response to COVID-19 via the online National Network platform. The situation is changing every day and very rapidly across the country.

The National Network facilitates the exchange of good practice between cities through the mailing group and online social media platforms, and together with partners are offering services for free for cities in the areas of legislation, lawyer support, smart e-communication, crisis management and e-communication.

The Network thanked WHO for their coordination and support. WHO support was requested to maintain regular sharing of information and providing information and guidance on mental health in particular. Further, the exchange of good practices examples from other countries regarding the concrete work and support provided for cities was requested.

Denmark, Danish National Healthy Cities Network

The Danish National Healthy Cities Network informed that in Denmark many medical and health students, as well as retired health workers are supporting the response across all regions in Denmark.

Most people seem to be respecting the social distancing measures put in place, however, many young people still meet in groups. This is thought to be because it is difficult for them to understand why they are not able to meet, as they do not feel at risk.

Finland, Finnish National Healthy Cities Network & City of Helsinki

The city of Helsinki commented that they have started working with a COVID-19 crisis group, led by the mayor.

The Finnish National Healthy Cities Network informed that they are organizing an online meeting for their members to discuss and share ideas on how cities and municipalities can support the residents with different needs. The meeting is intended for peer support purposes and to discuss what is the role of the health and wellbeing promotion in this situation.

A link was shared with further information: <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/helsinki-prepares-forcoronavirus-in-many-ways>

WHO support was requested to share good examples of how to collect and present data on a daily basis to inform citizens further.

France, City of Nice

The city of Nice informed that across France, including in the city of Nice, people are under social distancing measures. These measures include: people must walk alone and keep physical distance. This has led to almost a complete shutdown of the economy. In order to leave the house, people must present a signed paper to state that it is only for buying essential food and medicines. The measures are enforced through fines.

For the elderly and low-income groups, the city of Nice has organized food supplies, however it will be hard to sustain it if this situation remains for several weeks.

WHO support was requested for guidance on the use of masks by the general population, as there seems to be confusion regarding the messaging in France.

Germany, German National Healthy Cities Network

The German National Healthy Cities Network informed that local food banks are closed, but volunteers are shopping for those under quarantine. The Federal government is urging the population to adhere to the recommended social isolation guidance. The measures will be reviewed in line with the developing scenario and revised accordingly.

Across the country all Mutual/Selfhelp Centres are closed, and people cannot go to their weekly meetings – there is concern regarding the public health impact of this. An English language website was shared from the Robert Koch Institute with further information: https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html

WHO support was requested to share good examples on how to tackle and address the problems that will emerge locally, including isolation.

Greece, Hellenic National Healthy Cities Network

The Hellenic National Healthy Cities Network requested specific information from WHO targeting the local level.

WHO support was requested to provide information directly targeting the local level. One suggestion was to create a virtual platform with information for both cities and citizens, including a platform where good practice can be shared with other cities. This was deemed to be of particular pertinence considering that many cities experience the same problems, but are offering different solutions, and hence sharing of these measures is important.

Iceland, City of Reykjavik

The city of Reykjavik informed that Iceland has implemented a ban for social gatherings and asked people to work from home. Playschools are still open, albeit with restrictions, and are organizing service delivery through forming small groups. High schools and universities are closed, and hospitals and home for elderly are closed for visits.

Mass testing has been conducted nationwide, with an indicated 1 % infection rate. It is expected that this will probably change, but current information on the mass testing in Iceland is available in English at: <https://www.government.is/news/article/2020/03/15/Large-scale-testing-of-general-population-in-Iceland-underway/>

The city of Reykjavik informed that Iceland now a website with information and available in English: <https://www.covid.is/english> The specific section on data is updated daily and available at: <https://www.covid.is/data>

Ireland, Irish National Healthy Cities Network

The Irish National Healthy Cities Network is promoting WHO as a key source of information through both the National Network and other national sources of information. A request was made to WHO to identify to Ministers and Ministries of Health that WHO National Healthy Cities Networks are able to support national responses.

Israel, Israeli National Healthy Cities Network

The Israeli National Healthy Cities Network suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic is used as an opportunity to support networks and cities to acknowledge the city coordinators and the National Networks.

Support was requested from WHO to take action in identifying the WHO Healthy Cities and National Networks as partners in national response efforts to Ministries of Health in all countries.

Italy, Italian National Healthy Cities Network & City of Udine

Both the Italian National Healthy Cities Network and the city of Udine informed us about the dramatic situation in Italy, including high restrictions on public activities and the dramatic impact it has on people's daily life.

Both parties noted that risk perception is crucial, including raising people's awareness across the region of the potential severity of the situation, using Italy as an example. This is crucial because the risks that other countries face that hasn't yet reached the level of the situation of Italy.

It was noted that WHO plays a significant role in the COVID-19 response situation because it is transversal to all countries and can support political decisions taken at country level. Both parties thanked WHO for their support and indicated that they were happy to share further information both with WHO and other members of the Network.

It was noted that there is a lot of material circulating online, but having infographics with WHO logo would give it more authority and trust.

WHO support was requested to the WHO European Healthy Cities Network on the following points: 1) Streamlined guidelines for local and regional governments on the use of masks and other public health measures on how to behave in daily situations 2) Guidance on mental health and social distancing to fight fear of loneliness (The city of Udine is developing a project on methods for virtual meetings to tackle this issue) 3) Technical support adapted to political and community messages 4) Infographics and communication aimed at the local level 5) Guidance specifically on fragile groups 6) An online platform for cities to share documents, guidance, and good practice examples among themselves

Latvia, City of Riga

The city of Riga informed about 86 cases in total in Latvia.

The schools and universities across the country are closed, and from the week of 23 March, the country will start distance learning. Theatres, cinemas across the country are closed until 14 April, with potential for extension.

Retirement homes and hospitals, including maternity hospitals, are not open to visitors.

Transit tickets are not sold on public transport and no boarding is allowed at the front door in order to protect drivers from infection.

Supermarkets have set the time from 8am to 10am aside especially for seniors, families with children and pregnant women.

It was noted that in neighbouring Estonia the situation is also escalating.

Lithuania, City of Kaunas

The city of Kaunas informed that Lithuania is doing as much as they can to deal with this crisis. There are total quarantine measures in place since March 16, and there is a specific number to call for all citizens for advice.

The city informed that the Ministry of Health have established 10 mobile points in order for citizens to have a test for COVID-19.

The Netherlands, City of Utrecht

The city of Utrecht informed that across the country as soon as the restaurants were told to close, food was delivered to the local food banks. There are many volunteers across the country to support people in quarantine, vulnerable or elderly people.

Schools are organising online classes, as well as music teachers, and yoga classes.

In the city of Utrecht, the team on vulnerable groups (homeless, drug users, addiction) are working intensely in order to provide health services and shelters.

A key public health risk that has been identified in the Netherlands, is that parents are not bringing children for the 'normal' vaccinations anymore due to concern that their (small) children may be infected at the health facilities. There is a worry that decreasing vaccination rates might be an overall consequence.

WHO was thanked for their support and coordination, and interest was expressed to the continuation of sharing approaches, questions, lessons learned.

Norway, Norwegian National Healthy Cities Network

The Norwegian National Healthy Cities Network informed that the Network is focusing on promoting the information from WHO and from the National Institutes. They also concentrate on mental health issues and are conscious about spreading messages that can inspire hope.

Norway is in lockdown and they are concerned about the mental health effects on children, young people and adults.

Non-essential network activities have been cancelled due to the situation, allowing them to divert resources to supporting members.

Portugal, Portuguese National Healthy Cities Network

The Portuguese National Healthy Cities Network informed that in Portugal all cities have developed their own contingency plans, and their community support network is providing care to the elderly and delivering meals to isolated seniors.

A key issue in the country is the lack of PPE equipment such as masks and ventilators.

It was noted that the General Directorate of Health has a specific website for keeping people updated on the data in Portugal. Measures taken also include making a lot of public transport free with no ticket purchase required, and mandatory entry from the rear door in order to protect the driver.

All cities are doing daily disinfection of public spaces. At the time of the WEBEX, shops, coffee shops and restaurants had not yet all been closed, but the government is reassessing the situation daily. It was noted that in order to implement these measures the country has declared a state of emergency,

which is the first time that it has occurred under this constitution. It was noted that it was very useful for the Network to see all the measures cities and networks have taken, and WHO support was requested to collect and share good practices throughout the Network.

Russian Federation, Russian National Healthy Cities Network

The Russian National Healthy Cities Network informed that the situation in Russia with respect to COVID-19 is under control.

Regions are taking different measures including implementing distance learning for schoolchildren and students, the cancellation of mass events, and targeted assistance to elderly people and groups at risk of vulnerability.

Slovenia, Slovene National Healthy Cities Network

The Slovene National Healthy Cities Network informed that the country has closed all schools and all shops except for food shops.

Increasingly, companies are closing their production.

As of March 18, the country has banned the movement of people in public areas for more than 5 people.

All companies that can provide work from home have workers working from home. There is also a ban on public transport in place.

The country is identifying the procurement of further PPE equipment, in particular protective masks.

It was informed that as of the date of the meeting, Slovenia had performed 8730 CoV-2 tests and 286 confirmed infections.

Spain, Spanish National Healthy Cities Network

The Spanish National Healthy Cities Network informed that in Spain the situation is quite difficult, and in epidemiological terms, the country is following Italy very closely.

It was noted that a difference between the two countries was that Spain had tested less than Italy. It was noted that there is consensus that measures have been adopted late, and initially there was a lot of confusion with the information provided to citizens.

A particular challenge was to convince people that COVID-19 is more serious than a common influenza.

The country is now organizing well and implementing measures, however there are still a lot of people moving to their jobs, and there are a lot of people together in public transport, sharing spaces.

The situation in the capital, Madrid, is of particular concern, and hospitals are almost full. One key issue identified was with older people in nursing homes.

It was noted that all countries need access to credible information, and there should be coordinated measures put in place where possible (for example across the European Union).

Mental health was identified as being the most important public health consideration in the short term.

UK, City of Belfast & City of Carlisle

Children at risk who will potentially be at home every day are a vulnerable group as well as low income families who depend on free school meals across the UK.

Further support is requested from WHO for increased information for private sector/Chambers of Trade & Commerce.

It was noted that examples of good practice from other WHO Regions would also be valuable.

UNESCO Global Learning Cities

Vanessa Pogacnik Murillo was representing UNESCO Global Learning Cities Network. Information was shared from the UNESCO network which has 173 city member. All WHO European Healthy Cities Network members were invited to join the UNESCO learning cities respond to COVID-19 webinar today at 13.00-14.00, as well as on March 25. Cities around the world will share recent experience of respond by the education sector to the COVID19.