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EUROPEAN GROUP ON ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Statement

on

European Solidarity and the Protection of  
Fundamental Rights in the COVID-19 Pandemic

*This Statement was initiated on 26 March 2020 and issued on 2 April 2020.*

**COVID-19 pandemic**  
**STATEMENT ON SCIENTIFIC ADVICE**  
**TO EUROPEAN POLICY MAKERS**

24 June 2020  
#Coronavirus

By The Group of Chief Scientific Advisors of the European Commission,  
The European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies, and  
Peter Piot - special advisor to the President Ursula von der Leyen on the response to  
COVID-19

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Universität  
zu Köln



European  
Commission

Scientific Advice  
Mechanism (SAM)

**Scientific Advice**  
to European Policy in a Complex World

Group of Chief Scientific Advisors  
Scientific Opinion No.7, Sep. 2019

Independent  
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Report

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# Starting point

*„Besides the costs of lives and health, epidemics and pandemics have devastating effects on societal and individual wellbeing more largely. They strongly impact economies, livelihoods and psychosocial wellbeing across entire communities. Measures taken to mitigate them can come with threats to civil liberties and fundamental rights.“*

*„The current experience shows that good pandemic management is nuanced and is rooted in the scientific understanding of both the disease and its effects, coupled with critical societal and ethical considerations.“*



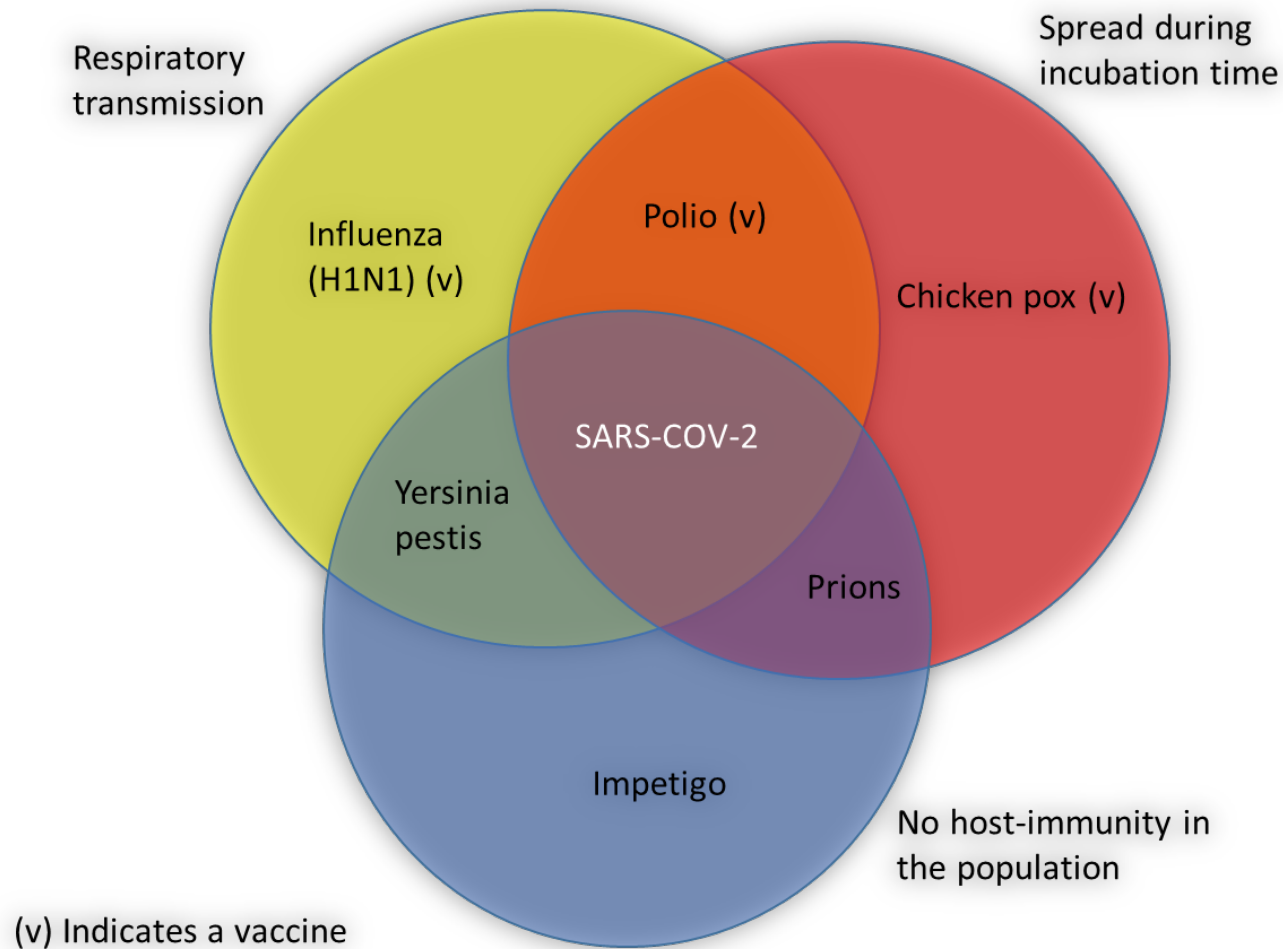


Figure 1: Venn diagram with circles grouping pathogens according to the presence of three major risk factors for pandemics, respectively respiratory transmission, spread during the incubation time, absence of host-immunity exists. For COVID-19 all three risk factors apply.

# The World was not prepared.




Figure 9: Time line of events and application of COVID-19 risk mitigation measure (see Bruinen de Bruin, Y. et al., 2020).

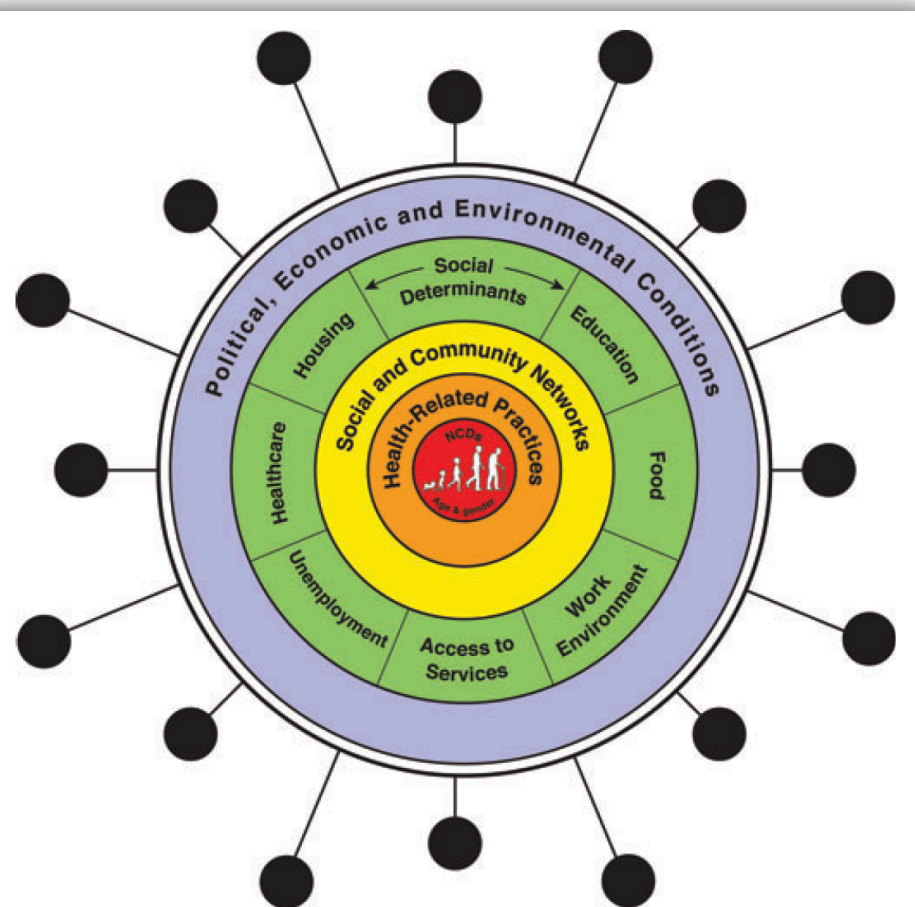
# COVID-19 is a syndemic pandemic.

Essay

## The COVID-19 pandemic and health inequalities

Clare Bamba <sup>1</sup>, Ryan Riordan,<sup>2</sup> John Ford,<sup>2</sup> Fiona Matthews<sup>1</sup>

**To cite:** Bamba C, Riordan R, Ford J, *et al.* *J Epidemiol Community Health* Epub ahead of print: [please include Day Month Year]. doi:10.1136/jech-2020-214401



**Figure 1** The syndemic of COVID-19, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the social determinants of health (adapted from Singer<sup>23</sup> and Dahlgren and Whitehead<sup>25</sup>).

# Overview of Recommendations

→ *Toolbox of flexible strategies*

- Prevent and pre-empt
- Enhance coordination across Member States
- Strengthen systems for preparedness and management
- Uphold fundamental rights and strengthen social justice
- Find solidaristic and sustainable ways of living

EU-level collaboration with coordinated management could be performed by agencies such as the proposed (BARDA)-like structure, building on ECDC and EMA.



## Prevent and Pre-empt

- Support multi-faceted efforts to investigate, map and reduce the risk of emerging infectious diseases globally, including the surveillance of pathogen reservoirs, mitigation, forecasting, and early detection of potential outbreaks.
- Support a combination of complementary approaches for accelerating the research on and development of responses to pathogens with epidemic and pandemic potential.
- Strengthen multi- and cross-disciplinary research on pandemic prevention, preparedness, responses and impact.

# Enhance coordination across Member States

- Establish a standing EU advisory board for health threats and crises, including epidemics and pandemics. This body should liaise with advisory bodies in the Member States as well as at EU and global level.
- Ensure that monitoring efforts are comprehensive, evidence-based, rapidly shared and well-coordinated across the EU.
- Establish a joint early-response mechanism to contain epidemics and pandemics, including a toolbox of strategies, such as testing, tracing, isolating as well as containment measures.
- Coordinate research and the development and implementation of medical countermeasures during a pandemic or other health threat.
- Coordinate research and the development and evaluation of social measures to mitigate harm and to increase resilience in case of pandemics or other public health crises. Social, economic, ethical, psychosocial and cultural challenges raised by a pandemic should be addressed as quickly as possible after its onset to inform a range of nuanced and locally appropriate measures.

## Strengthen systems for preparedness and management

- Encourage Member States to provide healthcare for all, respecting the principles of justice and solidarity.
- Ensure robust and equitable access to critical products and services for all EU citizens and demonstrate global solidarity. This involves pre-emptively providing criteria for the allocation, among and within Member States, of limited resources essential to manage a pandemic and mitigate harm, with due regard to the moral equality of all persons.
- Encourage Member States to strengthen public health infrastructures as an essential part of efficient and equitable health services ...; develop rapid and reliable testing and tracing systems ...; build public health workforce capacity and strengthen community infrastructures of social care.
- Establish systems for effective risk communication and tackling disinformation and misinformation during crises. ... Develop communication strategies for advice and policy that are evidence-based, ... and that counter stigmatising discourses.

- Together with Member States, develop strategies to sustain education in all sectors. The closure of educational institutions touches on several key areas of society and has long-lasting social, economic, medical and psychosocial consequences. It should be carried out with utmost restraint.
- Encourage Member States to strengthen efforts in community involvement and organisation and support civil-society organisations.
- Foster appropriate engineering and other controls in public buildings to limit infection risk indoors for airborne diseases, such as sufficient and effective ventilation, possibly enhanced by particle filtration ...

## Uphold fundamental rights and strengthen social justice

- Uphold highest standards in the protection of fundamental rights and civil liberties during pandemics. In the rare case of encroachments on rights and liberties to limit harm and risks during pandemics they should be considered only with utmost care, be explicitly limited in time, continuously reviewed and justified with respect to their necessity and proportionality and lifted as soon as possible.
- Implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, for example by extending social security benefits to workers in non-standard and precarious employment and updating policies towards an appropriate acknowledgement of the value of care work.

# Find solidaristic and sustainable ways of living

The COVID-19 crisis can also be seen as an opportunity to address systemic issues. Therefore, we recommend the European Commission to:

Take action in a cross-cutting manner upon the increasing body of knowledge about unsustainable ways of living, which also contribute to the emergence of epidemics and pandemics. This includes addressing the links between health crises and environmental degradation from a 'planetary health' perspective and to devise new and update existing policies in related fields, such as environmental protection, food, transport and urban planning. It also includes addressing the links between health crises, poverty and structural inequalities, expressing themselves in 'syndemic pandemics', and to devise new and update existing policies in related fields, such as employment, housing, social and economic aspects of ageing, gender and migration. A solidary and sustainable governance approach and the resulting trust in governance structures are at the core of resilience. We recommend to initiate and promote societal (including scholarly) debates about how to set conditions for strengthening systemic resilience to crises including, but not restricted to pandemics. Continuing this collaboration in 2021, it is our plan to provide a third joint advice on how Europe can develop towards stronger resilience.

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Deutscher Ethikrat 



Senal Aksoy/SH

26<sup>th</sup> Forum of National Ethics Councils (NEC)  
and the European Group on Ethics in Science  
and New Technologies (EGE)

*Thank you very much for  
your attention!*

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