



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Public health, country knowledge, crisis management
Crisis management and preparedness in health

Annex - Policy expectations for a Joint Action to strengthen health preparedness and response to biological and chemical terror attacks

The Joint Action aims to strengthen health preparedness and response to terrorist attacks across the health, security and civil protection sectors, focusing on biological and chemical agents.

At EU level, Decision 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats to health provides the framework to improve preparedness and to strengthen the response capacities to health emergencies of biological, chemical, environmental and unknown origin. The EU is an important security actor as codified in numerous policy frameworks, e.g. civil protection, health security, food security, infrastructure protection, hybrid threats and disaster relief. Key initiatives have been adopted recently at the EU level to prevent and prepare for terrorist attacks. In particular, security threats are addressed in the context of the European Agenda on Security¹ and the Security Union. The Commission Communication on an EU Action Plan to enhance preparedness against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear security risks², the 2016 Joint Communication on the Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats³ and the Joint Communication of 2018 on increasing resilience and bolstering capacities to address hybrid threats⁴, specifically address many security threats.

Following the 2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and subsequent attacks in cities across Europe, the Health Security Committee was exchanging lessons learned with regards to health sector preparedness for terrorism, emergency planning, coordination mechanisms and damage control practices, including psychological support. The Health Security Committee reflected on challenges and action areas under the EU health security framework based on the 'Background paper on health preparedness and response to terror attacks' developed by the Commission with Member States.

The aim of the Joint Action is to improve:

1. Preparedness for biological and chemical attacks;
2. Threat detection and risk assessment for health related terrorism acts;
3. Bridging between the public health, security and civil protection sector partners;
4. Health systems response including diagnosis and treatment of patients exposed to biological and chemical agents;
5. Availability and rapid response including the deployment of medical countermeasures across borders;

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/125863/EU%20agenda%20on%20security.pdf>

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:610:FIN>

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016JC0018>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ga/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018JC0016>

6. Implementation of non-pharmaceutical control measures, to avoid or mitigate the disruption to societal functions, the free movement of people and goods and economic losses;
7. Risk and crisis communication, including communication lines with the security, civil protection and other critical sectors;
8. Rapid information exchange, consultation, and coordination within and between Member States.

The Joint Action will focus on biological and chemical agents, considering the EU list of high risk biological agents, including those which are known to have been weaponised as well as risk/threat assessments indicating agents that terrorists are interested in.

An effective response requires preparedness in terms of coordination between the health and other sectors; clear command and control mechanisms regularly tested; and the capacity to rapidly mobilize health workers, health-care providers, emergency responders, law enforcement and security services.

The overall objective of this Joint Action is to address gaps in health preparedness and the urgent need to strengthen cross-sectoral work with the security, civil protection and other relevant sectors, in order to effectively respond to security events, involving chemical, biological and hybrid threats.

The Joint Action will build on work done by relevant projects and exercises under the Health Programme. In particular, it will collaborate closely with the Joint Action "Strengthened International Health Regulations and Preparedness in the EU" (SHARP) and the Joint Action "Healthy Gateways" and contribute to the objectives of the Security Union and the EU CBRN Action Plan.

Activities under this Joint Action may include:

- Sharing experience and guidelines between Member States, particularly using experience of mass events across European cities;
- Developing guidelines for risk/threat assessments and joint incident evaluation with the security and civil protection sectors;
- Mapping out key laboratory and specialised treatment capacities, improving the availability and rapid deployment of essential medical countermeasures, and developing mechanisms for cross-sectoral collaboration;
- Developing and organizing targeted trainings on damage control techniques to improve health system preparedness and response to terrorist attacks, and inter-sectoral capacity building;
- Developing/updating clinical guidelines for the recognition and case management of highly pathogenic infectious diseases, or exposure to chemical agents;
- Cross-sectoral capacity building through exercises, trainings, and developing networks in relation to crisis preparedness and response to key bio and chemical agents and mass gatherings;
- Assessing and supporting crisis management including emergency operations, non-pharmaceutical countermeasures and risk communication.

Work should focus on investing in strengthening collective preparedness and response capacities against terror attacks in the EU. This includes improving Member States' health systems' readiness and response capacities related to the rapid mobilization of resources, diagnosis, field and hospital treatment, and cross-sectoral support and coordination.

The recent terrorist attacks across Europe and globally highlighted both gaps and successful strategies in preparedness and response to terrorism. The Joint Action will ensure that the Member States of the European Union have access to good practice from across Europe and beyond and that the lessons learned from research, previous joint actions, exercises and experience from the serious terrorist incidents will be made available to improve cross-sectoral preparedness to withstand terrorist attacks.