

New COVID-19 precautionary measures: EMCDDA to switch to teleworking from 16 March 2020

EMCDDA staff members will be switching to teleworking today following a decision by its Director Alexis Goosdeel (¹). The decision comes as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to intensify and as the EU and its Member States adopt new precautionary measures.

In a statement informing employees on Friday (13 March), the Director stressed: 'As of today, there have been no recorded cases of COVID-19 contamination at the agency. The decision to switch to teleworking has been taken to strengthen efforts to protect EMCDDA staff and their families. But it has also been taken in the spirit of our common responsibility to help flatten the curve of infection and ease the pressure on national healthcare systems'.

Goosdeel added: 'This is a very unusual moment, both for the EMCDDA and for the EU and its citizens, and we will only be able to cope with the current situation by remaining united and solidary'.

The decision is the latest in a number of proactive contingency measures taken by management since late February to minimise the risk of infection, including: the postponement of meetings throughout March; the cancellation of work trips; limited access to the premises and the quarantining of a small number of staff members due to recent travel history (these quarantines have now ended without incident).

The agency is also reaching out on social media to find out more about coronavirus risks specifically for people with substance use disorders.

From the beginning of the outbreak, the EMCDDA has taken action in line with the scientific evidence published by the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#), the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#), the Portuguese health authorities and its own medical adviser.

The new decision will mean that staff members will telework for two weeks from today, although the period may be suspended or extended depending on the evolution of the situation. While staff will not be in quarantine, they will be advised to observe the recommended social distancing and hygiene protocols.

In preparation for the shift, staff members were trained last week in the technical skills required for an extended teleworking period and advised on how to adapt work methods and procedures in the current circumstances. The EMCDDA activated its business continuity plan at midnight on Friday 13 March to switch to remote working.

In response to the pandemic, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen also informed staff on 12 March that the Commission had activated a business continuity plan requiring staff in non-critical functions to telework from 16 March.