



STATEMENT BY FEAM'S PRESIDENT, PROF. GEORGE GRIFFIN ON THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Brussels, 12 March 2020

In December 2019, the first cases of a novel coronavirus disease –now referred to as COVID-19— were reported in the Hubei province in China. As the number of new cases, deaths and affected countries continued to increase, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020ⁱ, and a pandemic on 11 March 2020ⁱⁱ. The pandemic notification indicates free interpersonal spread of the infection. In addition to the human losses and pressures on healthcare systems and workers, the COVID-19 outbreak is also expected to lead to severe economic impacts worldwide.

We are now entering into a critical phase, calling for broad collaboration at all levels. As President of the Federation of European Academies of Medicine (FEAM), I welcome the efforts of the WHO and the EU institutions in supporting national authorities and research and medical communities, which are currently searching for therapies and vaccines while working to contain the outbreak and assist patients. It is also commendable that EU institutions are addressing the economic impacts of the outbreakⁱⁱⁱ.

Collaboration is needed to accelerate the development of adequate therapies, diagnostic tests and vaccines in addition to clinical understanding of the infection. Research and development efforts must involve the public and private sectors working in partnership. I therefore welcome the EU's initiative to allocate €47.5 million from the Horizon 2020 budget to fund projects advancing knowledge for the clinical and public health response against COVID-19^{iv}, and another €45 million –with a similar amount coming from the private sector for a total of €90 million –for the development of new treatments and diagnostic tools under the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI)^v. This and other efforts by national governments and funding organisations such as the Wellcome Trust^{vi}, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)^{vii}, and the Bill and Melinda Foundation^{viii} are critical to address this outbreak.

A vaccine may however take at least one year to be ready for use. Meanwhile, collaborative research is urgently needed to address key knowledge gaps about the outbreak (e.g. the animal origin of the disease, the transmission dynamics, risks factors)^{ix} in order to ensure that public health measures are based on the best scientific evidence available. The generation and timely exchange of necessary data should be encouraged and facilitated at EU level and

globally. Furthermore, collaboration across disciplines (including the social sciences) should be facilitated to ensure that the socio-economic, legal and ethical impacts of measures are well understood and addressed.

Actions announced by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, on 10 March 2020, are a significant step in this direction. Apart from funding research and development, the European Commission is coordinating measures with EU Member States – with the support of relevant EU agencies such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA)—and has convened a new team of epidemiologists and virologists to provide guidance at the European level. The EU has also announced a series of measures, including the “Corona Response Investment Initiative” to address the macro-economic impacts of the outbreak.

The impacts of this pandemic are still difficult to gauge. Among the unintended consequences of measures to contain the outbreak in the Hubei province in China, northern Italy, and other regions across Europe, might be disruption in the supply of some medicines, active ingredients and other medical products such as protective masks^x. This also calls for responses that are coordinated and based on principles of solidarity at EU level.

FEAM supports the implementation of an integrated ‘One Health’ approach reflecting the important connections between human, animal and environmental health. Novel viruses emerge as a result of natural mechanisms^{xi}. We should also avoid thinking in silos while preparing to, or facing an event such as the current COVID-19 outbreak.



Professor George E. Griffin

Emeritus Professor of Infectious Diseases and Medicine

St. George's, University of London

President of FEAM

ⁱ [https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

ⁱⁱ <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_440

^{iv} https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/coronavirus-eu-mobilises-eur10-million-for-research-2020-jan-31_en

^v <https://www.imi.europa.eu/news-events/press-releases/imi-launches-eur-45m-call-proposals-coronavirus>

^{vi} <https://wellcome.ac.uk/news/wellcome-pledges-10-million-tackle-novel-coronavirus-epidemic-covid19>

^{vii} https://cepi.net/news_cepi/cepi-expands-investment-in-covid-19-vaccine-development/

^{viii} <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2020/03/COVID-19-Therapeutics-Accelerator>

^{ix} <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf>

^x <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/addressing-potential-impact-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-medicines-supply-eu>

^{xi} <https://www.feam.eu/wp-content/uploads/OneHealthDeclarationBucharestMay2014FINAL-1.pdf>

About FEAM, The Federation of European Academies of Medicine (www.feam.eu)

FEAM is the umbrella group of Academies of Medicine, Medical Sections of Academies of Sciences, and Academies of Pharmacy and Veterinarians.

FEAM promotes cooperation between national Academies and provides a platform to formulate their collective voice on matters concerning medicine, health and biomedical research with a European dimension. Its mission is to extend to the European authorities the advisory role that national Academies exercise in their own countries with the aim to improve the health, safety and wealth of European citizens.

Further resources

- For information (including daily situation reports) and guidance for countries, healthcare workers and the public: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- For the risk assessment of the EU/EEA and UK area and daily reports see the webpage of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china>



FEAM

Federation of European
Academies of Medicine

Rue d'Egmont, 13
1000 Brussels | Belgium
+32 (0)2 793 02 50
E-mail: info@feam.eu
Twitter: [@FedEuroAcadMed](https://twitter.com/FedEuroAcadMed)

www.feam.eu