

EU proposes new agency for future health crises

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The European Union declared a health emergency on Wednesday and launched moves to build a new agency and joint plan to prepare for crises like the coronavirus epidemic.

Health policy is mainly the responsibility the bloc's member states, but EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said COVID-19 had shown the need for coordination.

Since the disease arrived in its cities in March, Europe has suffered at least 311,000 deaths from more than 13 million infections, and many countries have been hit by a second wave.

European officials admit that the 27 member states failed to coordinate properly during the first peak in infections in the first months of the year—allowing its rapid spread.

"To minimise the [negative impacts](#) on people and business, we have to work together to address [health](#) threats. The past year has shown us that fragmentation makes all member states vulnerable," Kyriakides said.

"We all witnessed the effects of the uncoordinated national measures during the first weeks, and even months of the outbreak," she said.

"We also saw the lack of readiness and preparation with shortfalls in medical equipment, testing capacity, and coordination and other areas.

"In times of crisis, where we are faced with health threats that transcend national borders, citizens expect the EU to take a more active role in protecting them."

There are signs that—with reintroduced national lockdowns of varying severity—the [second wave](#) may now be peaking, and there has been progress towards a vaccine.

But Kyriakides wants Europe to build a "health union" to boost its defences.

Brussels plans to create a new agency, the equivalent of the Biomedical Research and Development Authority (BARDA), which reports to the US Department of Health and has significant resources for collaborating with laboratories.

This new European institution—the Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA)—will be the subject of a formal project next year, with an expected entry into service in 2023, Kyriakides said.

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