

Minutes of SPI-M meeting: 7 December 2022

Published 6 April 2023

Meeting details

The meeting was held on 7 December 2022 from 1.30pm to 3pm on Microsoft Teams.

The co-chairs were Graham Medley (academic chair) and Thomas Waite (government chair).

Attendees

From the Scientific Pandemic Infections group on Modelling (SPI-M):

- Ellen Brooks-Pollock
- Declan Bradley
- Marc Baguelin
- Paul Birrell
- Andre Charlett
- Daniela De Angelis
- Louise Dyson
- Jessica Enright
- Thomas Finnie
- Christophe Fraser
- Julia Gog

- Michael Gravenor
- Thomas House
- Ian Hall
- Rowland Kao
- Adam Kucharski
- Matt Keeling
- Neil Ferguson
- Steven Riley
- Nick Watkins
- Christopher Williams

Observers:

- Hayley Butcher (DHSC)
- Nick Taylor (ONS)
- Sarah Deeny (UKHSA)
- Harry Mayhew (UKHSA)

There were an additional 9 observers whose names have been redacted as well as 8 members of the secretariat.

Participant apologies:

- Chris Robertson
- John Edmunds

Introduction

The committee was briefed on changes to the SPI-M secretariat and the new head of the secretariat was introduced.

The outstanding actions from the previous meeting were noted.

UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) update

UKHSA provided an update on their data strategy and the Centre for Pandemic Preparedness (CPP). A draft of the data strategy will be shared with the committee in due course. The data strategy will initially be internal looking and will identify guiding principles rather than a detailed plan of what data can be shared and with who.

The update on the CPP covered its reporting structures and current projects, its programme of work across the portfolios UKHSA has responsibility for will be initiated in early 2023. UKHSA expressed a desire to hear from the committee on their views as to how the CPP should be shaped.

Impact of border measures during a pandemic

Members were thanked for their work on the potential impact of border measures during a pandemic and an overview of the paper was provided.

The committee discussed the paper and a range of views were expressed on additional considerations.

It was noted that, to have a substantial impact, travel restrictions needed to be introduced early and prevent a very high proportion of imported cases. It was also noted that early identification of countries to which border measures should be applied was challenging and better collection of data on imported cases would be valuable.

The committee agreed that the local epidemiological situation and long-term goals of the government were highly relevant as to the appropriate border measures. The committee discussed scenarios where travel restrictions would become increasingly important and agreed that these included scenarios where the domestic rate of transmission is suppressed effectively with an R of less than 1. Additionally, even when R is greater than 1 small delays may still be highly valuable to policy makers.

There was also consensus that additional research, modelling and literature would be needed to fully inform future policy making.

The committee discussed the intended audience for the paper and agreed it should be aimed at specialists but made as accessible as possible. The feedback from the discussion will be factored into an updated version of the paper which will be shared with the committee.

Action: SPI-M secretariat to collate feedback from discussion and share with the authors of the draft paper.

Data lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic

A draft paper on the lessons learned on data usage and requirements from the COVID-19 pandemic was introduced. The committee were asked for their views on the paper and what other areas should also be considered.

The committee expressed a view that early access to imperfect data with suitable caveats is very valuable when full quality assurance processes could otherwise delay access to data. The committee also agreed that it was desirable for data to be provided at as fine a spatial scale as possible.

The data available on mobility and contacts was discussed, with the committee identifying a lack of data available on the mixing of vulnerable groups and of all groups over the Christmas period.

It was noted that much of the modelling during the pandemic relied on social contact surveys, such as POLYMOD¹, which are now quite old and would benefit from being updated.

It was suggested that the novel data sources developed during the pandemic, such as data from wastewater or mobile apps, should be included in the paper.

The committee discussed data on behavioural patterns and government interventions. It was noted that polling data on the response of individuals to government interventions was useful and that data that could be used to determine the effectiveness of these interventions early on was very valuable.

Members of the committee expressed the importance of having data on negative tests to the same resolution as positive tests and that setting up community studies so that raw data, rather than just results, could be shared immediately with researchers would be valuable.

¹ Improving Public Health Policy in Europe through the Modelling and Economic Evaluation of Interventions for the Control of Infectious Diseases (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/502084/reporting>)

The potential for the National Situation Centre (SitCen) to assist with establishing access to data was discussed and that it would be valuable for SitCen to understand in advance what data would be useful in the event of a future pandemic.

Action: SPI-M secretariat to liaise with the SitCen on plans to give a presentation at a future SPI-M meeting.

Upcoming projects

The chairs expressed a desire to continue capturing the lessons for pandemic preparedness from the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on 2 new areas. This work would take place in the first quarter of 2023.

The first area would examine the effectiveness of measures being introduced at a local and national level, such as the tier system introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second would look at social gatherings and the evidence which has emerged during the pandemic.

Action: SPI-M secretariat to work with the SPI-M chairs to consider potential authors for these projects.

It was noted that some work external to the committee is ongoing in this area, but that there was value in the committee looking at this from a modelling perspective.