



Health

Overview

The Federal Council has been aiming for closer collaboration with the European Union (EU) in the field of health since 2008, to enable the participation of Switzerland in the following areas:

- mechanisms for managing serious cross-border threats to health (including the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) and the Health Security Committee (HSC);
- the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), which assists participating states in areas such as early detection and analysis of health threats related to communicable diseases;
- the EU's multiannual health programme (which includes the financing of projects to improve wastewater monitoring systems).

In recent years, unresolved institutional issues have prevented the conclusion of a health agreement. As a result, cooperation between Switzerland and the EU has only been possible in certain cases, relying on the goodwill of the EU and limited exclusively to crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the package approach, Switzerland and the EU have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen their collaboration in the field of health by concluding the health agreement.

Key elements

The agreement gives Switzerland comprehensive access to the EU's health security mechanisms and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). It improves the early warning and response capabilities of the Swiss authorities during epidemics and allows for better protection of the Swiss population. It also provides for the possibility of future extension to other fields of health, if this is in the interests of both parties.

The agreement focuses on health security. Other aspects of health policy, such as tobacco or patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, do not fall within the scope of the agreement.

The institutional elements will apply by analogy in the health agreement, although it is not an internal market agreement. This is intended to ensure the proper functioning of the agreement and smooth cooperation.

Switzerland's participation in the EU's multiannual health programme (currently "EU4Health") is ensured by a protocol to the Programmes Agreement. Switzerland will only participate in the part of the health programme that is linked to the scope of the health agreement, namely the area of "crisis preparedness".

Implementation in Switzerland

The health agreement primarily provides for the possibility of Switzerland participating in the health security mechanisms and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Therefore, no modification of the law is foreseen.

Importance for Switzerland

Health crises do not respect borders. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that close cooperation and a coordinated, cross-border approach in Europe are essential. Switzerland has a significant interest in formally securing the cooperation with the EU in the area of health security, in order to strengthen its early warning and response capacity in the event of serious cross-border health threats and thus better protect the health of Switzerland's population. For example, this agreement enables Switzerland to quickly obtain all the necessary information on the spread of new virus variants in a neighbouring country or on experiences and findings regarding different test strategies.

Such cooperation is important for both crisis prevention and crisis response. It also strengthens knowledge sharing. This gives Switzerland the opportunity to participate in Europe-wide studies, for example, and to exchange and compare data and findings at the European level in areas such as antibiotic resistance.

Switzerland will still be able to make independent and sovereign decisions on measures to combat communicable diseases or other cross-border health threats in our country.

Specifically

- **Health security:** The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that health crises do not respect borders. The negotiated health agreement secures Switzerland's long-term access to EU crisis mechanisms. In the future, Switzerland will receive immediate information about the possible spread of a virus in a neighbouring country, for example, and can regularly exchange information with EU countries about the risks of cross-border health threats (e.g. a pandemic). In the event of a health crisis, the Swiss authorities will be informed promptly about new virus variants or effective test strategies, which will enable better protection of the population.
- **Targeted cooperation during a crisis, sovereign decisions at national level:** The agreement creates the basis for Switzerland to participate, if it so wishes, in the joint procurement of medical goods such as vaccines or protective equipment during a crisis. Switzerland will remain sovereign when making decisions on potential measures at national level.
- **Strengthening expertise:** Exchange with experts, particularly from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), is very valuable for Switzerland. The centre offers sound scientific analyses in areas that are also very important for Swiss health policy, such as antibiotic resistance.