

Points to consider before hosting the first teleconference

It is important to be aware that teleconferences inherently have both strengths and weaknesses. The latter include the fact that few people are accustomed to talking on the phone with more than one person at a time and that communication is difficult when you cannot see each other and do not immediately know who is talking or when to talk. Furthermore, in Europe, many meeting participants will be speaking a foreign language, which also may make communication difficult. Therefore it is particularly important that the teleconference is well organised, taking points such as these into account:

- as much information as possible is distributed before the meeting
- the agenda is clear
- all participants are introduced at the start of the meeting or a list of participants is distributed before the meeting
- one person leads the meeting. The choice of which organisation is to take charge of the teleconference, who is chairing and who is taking minutes should be determined prior to the start of the meeting and announced to the participants at the beginning
- the meeting chairperson remembers to make regular rounds asking the participants for comments one at a time before progressing from one point to the next on the agenda (when number of participants allows)
- the coordinating organisation may wish to try and limit the number of participants to the minimum required in order to improve effectiveness in discussion in the teleconference
- it is remembered that some participants may experience difficulties communicating in English over the phone and that the meeting chair could therefore politely summarise what has been said by participants (including native speakers of English) that speak in a way that makes it difficult for persons from other countries to understand
- the teleconference agenda should be followed as much as possible. If a new topic is brought up over the course of the teleconference that was not initially included on the agenda, it may be advisable to call for a new teleconference to address the topic
- if necessary, the meeting chair must ensure that participants' phones are set on 'mute' when not speaking
- a mobile phone number or an email address is available if participants encounter technical problems connecting to the teleconference
- the coordinating body, whether it is ECDC or a Member State, should distribute a template to collect the contact details of the individuals that need to receive the minutes and additional information, which should also be linked to the Ad-hoc forum in EPIS as required

It is helpful if simple collection of background data has been done prior to the meeting. This information may then be circulated before the meeting for participants to read, thereby minimising confusion at the meeting. A template for a outbreak information form that can be used to collect information from member states prior to the first teleconference is provided as part of this tool.

A template for an agenda to be sent round before the first teleconference is also provided here. During the later phases of the investigation of an international FWD outbreak, focus will shift to the collection and evaluation of results obtained during the course of the investigation and on deciding on which course the investigation should take in the future. Compared to the initial meeting, the number of participants may be smaller as there may now be a team working on the outbreak, making the agenda more focused.

When preparing for the initial teleconference, it may be advisable to consider the following “operational” checklist:

Before the meeting:

- ☐ Define clear objectives
- ☐ Define expected results
- ☐ Identify participants
- ☐ Clarify technical issues (number to call etc, possible use of videolinks, document sharing tools etc)
- ☐ Circulate form for information collection.
- ☐ Collect above forms and summarize information (report at meeting or send out before meeting)
- ☐ Distribute agenda
- ☐ Immediately after the meeting:
- ☐ Prepare minutes
- ☐ Prepare situation report (may be part of minutes)
- ☐ Distribute minutes and situation report to participants for comments within 24 hours