

Emergency and Response [1]

As part of its mission, Sciensano must be able to cope with all kinds of emergencies, potentially harmful to public health: food-borne epidemics, contaminated medicines, flu epidemics, environmental disasters, etc. When a health emergency occurs, Sciensano responds to the request of the health authorities.

Emergency Preparedness

An internal crisis plan has been drawn up describing the management of public health emergencies within Sciensano. It describes the internal organisation set up to manage the crisis and the post-crisis period. A crisis drill is organised every year to test the various existing documents and procedures. Crisis communication plans will also be prepared. Sciensano also has business continuity plans. These enable it to pursue its fundamental missions in times of crisis, when the workload increases dramatically and every second counts for decision-making and the rollout of operations.

Emergency response

Sciensano's objective in an emergency situation is to assist and advise the competent authorities in order to help reduce the impact of the health crisis on citizens.
Sciensano:

- adapts, develops and makes accessible the reference documentation, the scientific literature and research and response guidelines
- provides risk analysis, scientific advice and recommendations on scientific evidence-based control measures
- assists public health authorities in response operations (e.g. laboratory analyses, epidemiological surveys)
- prepares risk communication to staff, partners and the media

In times of crisis, the workload increases dramatically while every minute counts to make decisions and carry out the necessary operations. Consequently, Sciensano's usual functioning must be adapted to maintain its essential activities, while ensuring the effectiveness of the response to the public health emergency. For this purpose, Sciensano applies some general principles:

- the usual activities related to its fundamental tasks are identified and reorganised, if necessary by adapting their priority

- the basic staff of crisis management structures are fully assigned to managing the crisis and relieved of their usual functions
- the crisis manager is responsible for both the technical management and the coordination of the teams
- the Sciensano managing director oversees all strategic decisions
- all communications to constituent parties, partners, the media and the general public are made in accordance with the crisis communication plan

National and international crisis management

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) require each Member State to have a structure capable of dealing with any health crisis. To this end, Belgium has set up a strong structure with three components:

- the [Risk Assessment Group](#) [2] (RAG)
- the Risk Management Group (RMG)
- the National Focal Point (NFP)

Sciensano coordinates the RAG in charge of assessing risks to public health in a national and international context. The RAG analyses any signal that may have an impact on health and proposes prevention and control measures to the RMG. The RAG is composed of permanent experts who are public health professionals supported by specific experts. They are invited according to the type of signal: infection, environmental problem, etc. The RMG is composed of the health authorities and therefore decides on the measures to be applied. The NFP ensures the implementation of measures in consultation with the various entities. It acts as a relay for communication with European and international institutions.

Source URL: <https://www.sciensano.be/en/about-sciensano/emergency-and-response>

Links

[1] <https://www.sciensano.be/en/about-sciensano/emergency-and-response> [2]
<https://www.sciensano.be/en/projects/coordination-risk-assessment-group>