



ECDC AURORAE training programme

Laboratory influenza and SARS-CoV-2 trainings

18 February 2024, Solna

Background:

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) relies on the European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) Member States' expertise and laboratory capacities to support its public health core functions and disease specific work within its mandate.

AURORAE is a consortium of 12 institutions in 8 EU/EEA member states that the ECDC procured to provide support to microbiology-related activities and capacity building focusing on COVID-19 and influenza in the EU/EEA, the Western Balkans and Türkiye by providing:

- **EQA and ring trial activities**
- **Centralised laboratory support** for influenza and SARS-CoV-2 viruses in-depth characterisation for timely pandemic response
- **Training activities** for detection, characterisation and response.

By providing training and encouraging cooperation between expert and reference laboratories, the ECDC aims to foster the development of sufficient capacity within the Community, enhance data sharing and collaborations between public health institutions and the ECDC, and facilitate networking activities and cross-border collaborations.

The overall objectives of the AURORAE trainings are to support countries in building capacities in the areas of diagnosis, detection, identification, and characterisation of primarily influenza and SARS-CoV-2 viruses. Courses may include topics like diagnostic methods, molecular typing, sampling strategies for disease surveillance and for detection, use and limitation of test methods, testing strategies, test interpretation, bioinformatics, biosafety issues, shipment of infectious material, quality assurance, as well as capacity gaps identified through EQAs and/or surveys. The training programme was initiated in July 2022.

Of note: there will be no costs for training activities for the participants or countries, all costs for training, accommodation, and travel arrangements will be covered by ECDC through the AURORAE consortium framework contract.

Training formats:

The training formats include face-to-face training courses (wetlab and drylab), twinning visits of various durations, and virtual trainings (webinars, instructive videos, self-paced online trainings).

Face-to-face trainings (3-5 days).

- This type of training will give a broad overview and is therefore targeted to participants that with beginner or advanced subject knowledge
- Participants should have a microbiology or related background and should be familiar with relevant common molecular techniques
- Up to ten participants per course

Twinning visits (2, 5 or 10 days)

- This type of training will give an in-depth focussed training on a selection of specific methods for participants with advanced or expert subject knowledge and also aims to enable cascading of the training.
- For the twinning visits, usually one participant will visit a twinning institute for a tailored training. Therefore, the exact training content will depend on the participant and will be discussed and agreed before the start of the training.

Virtual trainings

- A range of formats can be used, including webinars, instructional videos, and self-paced online courses
- Virtual trainings will be hosted on the EVA platform and usually are open to everyone.

Training target audience:

The target audience of the training programme are professionals with background in microbiology or similar fields. Eligibility criteria include:

- The participants should be or will be involved in the microbiological surveillance of respiratory viruses (e.g. SARS-CoV-2 and/or influenza) and should be able to actively apply skills acquired as part of the training.
- The participants should be part of the European Influenza Surveillance Network (EISN) and/or European COVID-19 surveillance network (ECOVID-Net) or must currently be employed in the public health sector in one of the EU/EEA countries, the Western Balkan (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) or Türkiye.

Exact pre-requisites for participation may vary by course, specifically in terms of subject knowledge, and training activities are marked as "Beginner", "Advanced", or "Expert" level courses.

Expression of interest process:

The EISN and ECOVID-Net are informed by the ECDC about upcoming training activities by a call for expression of interest and the responses are collected through the EU survey tool.

- ECDC will send out invitation letters to the National Focal Points (NFP) for Respiratory viruses.
- The NFPs specified above are kindly asked to invite appropriate staff/colleagues to submit their expressions of interest for training activities.
- The EU survey tool should be filled out separately for each individual.
- For individuals expressing interest in trainings the following should apply:
 - their work should include tasks to actively apply skills acquired as part of the training.
 - they should be selected to ensure the maximum impact of the training on the public health sector they serve, taking into consideration their projected period of implementation of skills at the institute, and possibilities of potentially cascading training nationally and direct use of the acquired skills.
 - they will need to submit a short version of their resume (one page CV) and their motivation for their participation in the respective training activities.
 - in addition, the country's NFP for Respiratory viruses should submit a short paragraph (letter of endorsement) endorsing that participant and describing how the host institute can benefit from their participation in the selected training activities.

Selection process:

- ECDC will review expressions of interest after the deadline for submission has passed.
- ECDC strives to respect equal opportunities for countries, but priority may be given to countries with larger identified training needs as identified through past EQAs, surveys, or similar if applicable.
- Participants will be selected based on professional background, maximum impact, and course availability and previous participation in similar ECDC-funded training activities within the last 2 years.
- More than one applicant from the same country can be accepted for the same training activity, but acceptance depends on availability of seats.
- ECDC and AURORAE aim to send notification letters to all candidates within two weeks after the end of the submission period.

Replacement of participants:

In the event, that a selected participant cannot attend a scheduled training for a justifiable reason (e.g. sickness), the AURORAE partner conducting the training and the ECDC need to be informed at the earliest time possible. The NFP for Respiratory viruses of the selected participants institute or country may propose a replacement candidate to participate in the training instead. The NFPs are to ensure that the replacement candidate has comparable qualifications and expected benefit of the training activity as the initially selected individual.