COVID-19, the coronavirus and risks run by healthcare staff

In December 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19, the coronavirus, was first reported in China, in the Wuhan region, and spread from there over the whole world.

Today, 10th March 2020, more than 114 000 infections are reported worldwide and the death toll has exceeded the number of 4 000.

The risks run by healthcare staff in the treatment of patients who have been struck by the virus, are enormous and need to be meticulously addressed. Not only the staff run risks themselves, but when unknowingly infected, they can infect other people they have contacts with, such as their family or other random people they meet in society. Therefore, from the first contacts with people who show (even mild) signs of possible contamination, staff have to be very careful to wear the right protective gear and follow the right protocol to keep themselves and their patients safe.

Eurofedop will get into contact with the European Commission to insist on the need for paying special attention to the difficult situation faced by healthcare staff and their closest relatives, due to the coronavirus crisis. It is of utmost importance that zero-risk protection is assured for healthcare staff who are responsible for providing healthcare to coronavirus patients.

With the number of infected cases still rising and, considering the problems known by many countries with regard to personnel numbers in healthcare, the workload might become extremely high and reach a critical point for healthcare staff, thus increasing the risks they run in the treatment of (not only coronavirus) patients.
Apart from the health risks run by healthcare staff, with a continuing rise of the coronavirus becoming an acute problem, countries might also be confronted with a growing need for appropriate medical material for the treatment of patients.

The European Union tries to support as much as possible the Member States in containing the disease and protecting the personnel who have been in contact with coronavirus patients. The European Commission has set up a coronavirus response team, consisting of five Commissioners responsible for the most affected policies (crisis management, health, border-related issues, mobility, macroeconomic aspects). Moreover, it has step up research funding and selected 17 projects in vaccine development, treatment and diagnostics. For an update on the activities of the different EU institutions, see the special coronavirus website.

More on the preparedness and response to COVID-19, including the protection of healthcare workers, see the website of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (European Union Agency, located in Solna, Sweden).