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## **Corona in Belgium**

Like all the countries in the world, Belgium was hit by the Corona outbreak in the beginning of March 2020. However, the first COVID-19 positive patients were detected in the beginning of February.

In Belgium, there are many Ministers for Health beside the Federal Minister. All the regions and communities have their own ministers with specific competences. On 12 March 2020, the federal emergency plan was enforced. This meant that all the decision onwards were taken by a management cell composed of the Prime Minister, the competent ministers and the ministers-presidents.

After the Chernobyl incident, a special Task Force was created to deal with the different issues related to this crisis. Likewise, the management cell consists of the Federal Department of Health, the Presidents of the different Regions and Communities, as well as a strong bunch of specialists in the field, mainly leading scientists whose decisions are evidence-based.

The first measures were taken: suspension of classes, closure of the catering industry and of non-essential stores. Teleworking is recommended. Visitors are no longer allowed in care centres.

On 14 March 2020, the hospital emergency plan came into force. The hospitals adapted their daily way of working. Non-urgent consultations and interventions were be postponed until further notice. There were also almost no more visitors. The hospitals prepared themselves for the arrival of corona patients.

Despite the fact that Belgium has a relatively large number of intensive care beds compared to some other European countries, the hospitals have greatly increased the capacity of intensive care beds in the months of February and March 2020.

The biggest problem was and remains the lack of mouth masks and test material.

Compared to the other European countries, the death toll in Belgium seems very problematic. From the outset, Belgium decided to include in the death toll, not only confirmed COVID-19 deaths in the hospitals, but also confirmed and suspected COVID-19 deaths outside the hospitals. The counting methods to report the casualties should be standard all over the countries to validate the comparison between figures.

Unlike other countries, we did not “import” physicians or nurses from abroad. We permitted the last year students in medicine and nursing to “practice” fully, under supervision...

From 4 May 2020 the lockdown measures started to phase out gradually. The hospitals were allowed to restart their normal activities. The FPS Public Health, in collaboration with the VBS-GBS, drew up for each medical specialism, lists of cares which can be started up according to their urgency and the patient's condition.

On 4 the same day, do-it-yourself shops re-opened. On 11 May, it was the turn of all the other shops, excepting those with close contact such as hairdressers... 8 June 2020 would be the day for the reopening of the hotels, bars and restaurants, provided that the figures related to the situation of the infection remain under control. Otherwise, measures could be revised back.

From 4 May 2020, it is also mandatory to use mouth masks in public transports but it is not mandatory for other activities such as shopping, in as much as the physical distancing can be respected.