

Press release

The euPrevent COVID-19 study is a collaboration between:



Heerlen, 3 November 2021

COVID-19 research

Great similarities between countries of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion

Interim results on the impact of COVID-19 on the border region

A study of the impact of COVID-19 on the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine (EMR), which was started by a cooperation of health authorities across the borders (under the lead of GGD Zuid Limburg) in cooperation with cross-border partners, shows that about 60 to 80 percent of the residents in the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine complied well with the corona measures and found them easy and useful. The mobility measures were considered restrictive by residents in the border region; they were less likely to cross the border for a short visit. 'Back to normal' was the most frequently given reason for having a corona vaccination.

Research

The survey consists of two stages. The invitations for the first stage were sent out in April-May 2021 and the invitations for the second round in late September/early October 2021. The survey consists of taking blood samples via a finger prick, which measures antibodies against corona virus in the blood, and filling in a questionnaire. In the first round, 4766 invitees gave blood samples and completed the questionnaire. This provided information about the first 16 months of the corona pandemic in the border region. There is more about this in the appendix fact sheet "Impact of COVID-19 on the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion". This fact sheet contains information about the questionnaire data of the first round. The first final results of the survey, including the results of the citizens' summits, will be presented at the euPrevent COVID-19 conference on 16 December.

Corona measures per border region

Whereas in times of the corona pandemic we faced the same problems, the countries of the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine dealt with this differently. Known measures which were or are in force in all three countries are those for:

- keeping at a distance of one and a half metres,
- limiting the group size,
- reducing travel, and
- wearing a face mask.

The vast majority (60-80%) of the participants in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands indicated that they had been following these measures carefully in the two months prior to completing the questionnaire and that they found the measures easy and useful.

Communication team

Note to editors. Not for publication: For more information, please contact:

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"It is striking that participants in Germany found the measures the most useful and they also complied with them the best," said research leader Prof. Dr. Christian Hoebe, professor of infectious disease control at GGD Zuid Limburg and Maastricht UMC+. Keeping one and a half metres distance was considered the most useful by the EMR residents. They also found it easier to wear a face mask than to keep one and a half metres distance, to limit the size of the group, and to reduce travelling.

Mobility abroad

About half of the participants have family, friends or acquaintances across the border. "This interconnectedness with neighbouring countries is a well-known fact for people living in the border region Euroregion Meuse-Rhine," says Stefaan Demarest, project manager for health research at Sciensano. As a result of the corona pandemic, the frequency of visits has changed. Residents of the EMR have visited family, friends or acquaintances less often and have crossed the border less often for short visits, for example for shopping or going to a restaurant. More than half (62%-68%) of the participants with family across the border considered the corona measures as (severely) limiting their mobility.

Again, it is striking that the perceived mobility limitations are largely similar between the countries. The reduced mobility was also confirmed in the citizens' summits organised in the three countries. In these citizens' summits the voice of the residents was included to gain an insight into how they experienced COVID-19.

Vaccination reasons

"Everyone wants to get back to the old normal, as things were before. It therefore comes as no surprise that this is the most frequently cited reason for taking a corona vaccination", said PD Dr. med. Norbert Schnitzler, head of the Düren District Health Office. The reasons that follow are:

- protecting family, and
- preventing disease.

Again, it is notable that these top three reasons for vaccinating are the same in all three countries.

Only 3% of the participants indicated that they did not want to take the vaccination.

The most frequently cited reasons for not wanting to be vaccinated against the coronavirus were:

- concerns about the possible side effects of the vaccine,
- not being afraid of becoming seriously ill from a possible corona infection, and
- the view that vaccinations are not effective.

There were also a number of doubters among the participants (9%). The absence of serious side effects after long-term use of corona vaccinations was cited as the most important consideration in making the decision to be vaccinated or not.

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Partners

This research was conducted by GGD Zuid Limburg, Foundation euPrevent, Maastricht UMC+, Düren District Health Office, Heinsberg District Health Office, Health Department of the Aachen Region, Sciensano and German-speaking Community of Belgium. The project is subsidised from the Interreg EMR program. "International cooperation and knowledge transfer are an important basis for assessing the impact of a pandemic like COVID-19 on complex border regions like the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. The results of this research can be presented as a showcase for other border regions in the EU or even more widely," says Brigitte van der Zanden, Director of the euPrevent Foundation.

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