

Press Release 26.11.2021

Volt Belgium's response to the new Covid-19 measures

- > Introduction of stricter measures to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus
- > Urge to find sustainable long-term solutions with scientific tools



Belgium - Over the past few weeks the healthcare system in Belgium and in Europe have been once again heavily burdened due to the Covid-19 virus, with many hospitals running out of intensive care units (ICU) and making them unable to treat patients of any kind. Volt Belgium of course understands the decision by the Belgian authorities to introduce stricter measures to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus and we urge all citizens to respect them.

At the same time, we urge the Belgian authorities to find sustainable long-term solutions to sharply reduce the frequency of big outbreaks of Covid-19 in the future and to enable citizens and businesses to live with the virus without recurring restrictions of social life. The scientific tools to do this exist. We listed below some of them.

- **Ventilation of buildings:** As demonstrated in many scientific studies [1], the major pathway of covid-transmission is through aerosols in badly-ventilated indoor settings.

Effective ventilation is the most underused mitigation strategy to reduce the covid-pandemic at present. Earlier studies with other airborne viruses such as tuberculosis demonstrated that keeping indoor carbon dioxide levels below 1000 ppm (corresponding to 1,5% re-breathed air (=the fraction breathed air by people in the room rebreathed by other people in the room), can avoid 97% of all disease propagation [2].

Indoor CO₂ monitors with an infrared NDIR sensor (which are a proxy for the percentage of breathed air from people we rebreath) can be used to monitor ventilation of an indoor building and should be widely implemented in as many possible indoor public and private settings. Currently, there are far too few checks whether this law is followed and implemented.

In addition, we should urgently start by implementing mechanical ventilation in buildings as a sustainable long-term solution, from hospitals, to shops and supermarkets, to residential care settings, to schools, to pubs and so on: mechanical ventilation should be implemented. This will cost some money, yes, but the total cost of this is less than the cost of all financial supportive measures the government has taken during the lockdowns as a compensation for the closures. In cases mechanical ventilation is not feasible at some locations, a combination of natural ventilation (making sure there are some windows open) and air filtration can be chosen.

- **Smart and Strategic planning of vaccination:** While vaccines offer excellent protection, it is in meanwhile clear that this protection wanes over time, especially for the elderly who develop less antibodies after vaccination compared to younger people [3]. Therefore, we **urge the governments to booster all persons over 50 before the Christmas holidays**. We also urge all people under 50 to get vaccinated if they are not vaccinated yet, because there are a negligible number of people under 50 who are vaccinated in the hospitals. In the future, booster shots for the Sars-cov-2 virus should be planned strategically: probably the best way will be to plan future booster shots annually around September as the protection is the highest 6 months after the booster, in order to shoot them just before the start of the covid-season around October.
- **Avoid symbolic and ineffective restrictions:** Many mayors and governors in Belgium forbid a number of outdoor events and activities during the last week. However, we know that the transmission of the virus in outdoor settings is negligible [4]. We urge all governments to refrain from taking ineffective measures and ineffective social restrictions. Those don't help control the spread of the virus and do more harm than good. Lockdown-related measures did cause record-incidences of depression, which is

also an important public health problem. Depression also causes a burden on our physical health, for example by increasing the incidence of myocardial infarctions and cardiovascular mortality [5]. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to avoid unnecessary restrictions that have no real effect. That is also true for border restrictions within the European union: follow the strategy of the European Commission but refrain from populist and ineffective border closures like the travel ban within Europe of last year: even the countries with the most strict closed borders didn't keep out any new virus variant.

- **Promote rapid covid-self-tests and reduce their price**, also as a tool to reduce pressure on first-line healthcare workers. People experiencing covid-symptoms can test and isolate themselves. It is no longer necessary to register every covid case, as there are reliable tools available to monitor the propagation of the virus, such as sewage water monitoring. Self-tests can also be promoted in advance of high-risk meetings, for example family reunions in badly ventilated indoor settings. The government should also set a maximum price of € 2,50 on rapid antigen tests, as the current price in the pharmacies of € 8,00 per test is far too high (discourages use) and other countries like Germany made it also able to get rapid self-tests for prices between € 2 and € 3. Also note that the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) repeatedly concluded that those rapid self-tests have an excellent sensitivity [6].

The Executive Board of Volt Belgium ASBL

Further information:

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For media inquiries please contact:

board@voltbelgium.org

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