

Cross Border Taskforce Corona
Belgium – Netherlands – North Rhine-Westphalia – Lower Saxony – Rhineland-Palatinate

69th Meeting, 18th March 2021, 2.30 – 3.25pm (conference call)

Minutes

Participants as listed in the attachment

(1) Opening

5.1.2e (NRW) opens the meeting and welcomes the participants.

(2) Situation reports

5.1.2e (NRW) summarises the overall situation as deteriorating. BE and NL have reached an incidence rate of >200. The German Länder are heading towards an incidence rate of 100. R-value is clearly above 1 in all countries. In Germany, the share of the British virus variant is at 72%, which is higher than in neighbouring countries.

Belgium, the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Rhineland-Palatinate add to the general report:

- BE (5.1.2e) reports that the share of the South African virus variant is currently at 6%, with hot spots mainly in West Flanders. Total numbers of deaths have been decreasing but the situation in hospitals is not yet relaxing. The situation at the border remains quiet.
- NL (5.1.2e): Most of the new cases occur in lower age groups, which can be explained by the fact that primary and secondary schools are open and 0-12 year old children are tested more frequently. The situation at the border remains quiet.
- LS (5.1.2e): The situation at the border remains quiet.
- RP (5.1.2e): The incidence rate is at 66 but expected to go up. France has not been designated as a high incidence area, but will likely become one next week. The situation at the border is currently quiet but the political atmosphere remains tense. Luxembourg has an incidence rate of >200. If Luxembourg is classified as a high incidence area, RP will not have enough testing capacity to test all of the 35 000 cross-border workers every 48h.

There are no stationary controls at the border. The federal police operates within a 30 km radius behind the border. The online registration is only valid for a single entry so even cross-border workers need register on a daily basis. A document or "laissez-passer" and an app with information about the current legal situation would be helpful, e.g. for parents bringing their child to school.

- NRW (5.1.2e): There is a stronger increase of cases in the last few days. Death rates are decreasing. There is a slightly higher rate of positive test results. New cases occur more often in lower age groups. Regarding virus mutations, the British variant has a share of about 50-60%. The South-African has only been

identified in some regions and plays a minor role in NRW. The border situation remains quiet.

The summary of risk assessments continues to be as follows:

| Assessment by | Region | Consequence |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Belgium | Germany: the whole country is classified as “red” (since 11/11). https://diplomatie.belgium.be/nl/covid_tabel | The Belgian government discourages travel to areas classified as “red”. For “red”, quarantine and (PCR)tests are compulsory. |
| | Netherlands: entirely “red”. | |
| Netherlands | Germany: Germany is classified entirely as “orange” for health reasons (since 3/11). https://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/anden/duitsland/reizen/reisadvies | “Orange” for health risk means: only necessary travel; no tourist trips. After a stay in Germany or Belgium, strong recommendation for quarantine at home for 10 days on return to the Netherlands plus (PCR)test. |
| | Belgium: entire country is “orange” for health risk reasons. https://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/anden/belgie/reizen/reisadvies | |
| Germany | Belgium – entire country is a “risk area” (since 30 Sept). | New quarantine rules since 5 th January 2021: Quarantine obligation only until negative test result |
| | Netherlands: entire country is a “risk area” (since October 17). | |

(3) Matters of common interest

Expert meeting between Belgian and German virologists

BE 5.1.2e reports about the results of an expert meeting between Belgian and German virologists this morning:

1. The South-African virus variant has a higher share in BE than in Germany, but this variant is mostly located in western Flanders. In general, both, BE and NRW have problems with locating virus variant hotspots. This is due to anonymous testing.
2. The dynamic of the virus in NRW, RP, NL and BE shows that incidence rates and cases often do not resemble national borders, but rather linguistic ones. There seems to be a close connection between cases in NL and Flanders and German states and the German-speaking part of Belgium. In addition, there is a hard border between the Dutch-speaking regions and the French-speaking region of Wallonia.

Risk assessments and high incidents areas

The NL and BE are currently classified as risk areas. This is not likely to change soon. However, due to an increase of the 7-days incidence above the level of 200, both countries could be classified as high incidence areas in the future.

A classification as a high incidence area would have certain consequences on cross-border traffic:

- Registration rules (federal law): Travellers from high incidence areas must register before they enter the country if they want to stay more than 24 hours. Those who stay less than 24 hours do not have to register. This also applies to transporters of goods or people. Transporters on transit through Germany do not have to register either.
- Testing rules (federal law): As a rule, travellers from high incidence areas need to be tested before entering Germany; the test must not be older than two days. There will be no exception for stays shorter than 24 hours. However, testing will not be obligatory for two important groups of people. (1) Transporters of goods or persons. (2) Cross-border workers. For the latter group, the legal requirements still need to be created, following the example of other Länder.
- Quarantine rules (Länder law): There will be no additional quarantine obligations for travellers from high incidence areas compared to risk areas.

Additional vaccines provided by the EU

NL 5.1.2e informs that there are no significant differences between border regions and non-border regions in the Netherlands regarding the number of cases and incidence rates. Therefore, the government does not intend to channel additional vaccines to border regions but rather use it in the framework of its existing vaccination strategy.

BE 5.1.2e: The BE government has not yet decided about the use of additional vaccines.

Next meeting: 25th March 2021, 2.30 pm