

THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

URGENT APPEAL ON THE ONGOING COVID-19 CRISIS

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on 12 October 2020



The Interdisciplinary COVID-19 Advisory Team to the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences has just released a series of recommendations that should help prevent the further spread of the pandemic. The team appeals to employers, healthcare professionals, and all individuals to alter our attitudes and behavior to protect the most vulnerable members of society.

The first wave of COVID-19 affected Poland somewhat less severely than other countries due to the extensive, promptly implemented restrictions. However, as autumn progresses, we are seeing a rapid increase in SARS-CoV-2 infections, and, sadly, in deaths of patients suffering from COVID-19 caused by the virus. Many undiagnosed or asymptomatic people are infecting others, and the situation is starting to spiral out of control. We must realize that unless we all alter our dismissive attitudes and behaviors, on individual and collective levels, Poland's healthcare system will become completely overwhelmed within a month. We are already seeing shortages in hospital vacancies.

The danger this entails is that in the near future, people unable to access help and support may die at home or even on the streets. Forecasts indicate that the situation will worsen in the coming days. Even a complete lockdown would only start showing results in around two weeks' time. However, medicine and the economy are deeply intertwined; the costs of another lockdown would be enormous, and we should avoid this as much as possible. Government decrees or even declaring a state of emergency will not be sufficient to prevent the worst; it is up to us citizens to take action, to change our behavior to protect the most vulnerable members of society. You and I can take steps

right now to protect ourselves and our families and friends, by adhering to the following recommendations.

Recommendations for all individuals:

1. Do not spit on or sneeze at the face of your family, friends, acquaintances and strangers. Every breath exhaled through the nose and mouth releases tiny droplets of saliva and nasal secretions. They usually fall to the ground within about 1.5 meters of the individual. When someone speaks in a normal tone, the number of aerosol droplets and their range increase slightly. When they raise their voice, the range increases again, and when they are shouting or singing loudly, the

ABOUT THE TEAM

The Interdisciplinary COVID-19 Advisory Team to the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences was set up on 30 June 2020. The team is led by Prof. Jerzy Duszyński, President of PAS, with Prof. Krzysztof Pyrc (Jagiellonian University) acting as deputy. Dr. Aneta Afelt (University of Warsaw) is the secretary of the board. Other members are Prof. Radosław Owczuk (Medical University of Gdańsk), Dr. Anna Ochab-Marcinek (PAS Institute of Physical Chemistry), Dr. Magdalena Rosińska (National Institute of Public Health – National Institute of Hygiene), Prof. Andrzej Rychard (PAS Institute of Philosophy and Sociology) and Dr. Tomasz Smiatacz (Medical University of Gdańsk).

volume of droplets and their range are significantly greater. Aerosol droplets emitted by an infected person contain the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and they are the main route of infection. This is why perhaps the most important recommendation is to maintain a distance of at least 1.5 meters from other people and to wear a mask covering the nose and the mouth. If possible, any meetings in person should be held out in the open air, and travel should be avoided unless strictly necessary.

2. Make sure you wash your hands frequently, and use disinfectant when this is impossible.
3. If you feel unwell and think you may have a cold or flu, stay at home and do not meet others. Wait until all symptoms have passed, and ideally leave it a day or two longer. Contact your GP to check whether you should have a COVID-19 test.
4. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or you have lost your sense of smell and/or taste, inform everyone you have had contact with between now and two days before the onset of symptoms. Although this is the duty of the public health & safety inspectorate, its highly overworked and exhausted staff may not be able to respond sufficiently fast.
5. If any of your child's schoolfriends or their parents have tested positive for COVID-19 (for example, if you have been so informed by their school or kindergarten), stay at home unless absolutely necessary, maintain strict social distancing at work, wear a mask, and wash and disinfect your hands frequently. If you or your child start experiencing even the mildest symptoms, contact your GP immediately. Avoid contact with vulnerable people.
6. If any of your friends or colleagues test positive for COVID-19, follow the advice given above.
7. Make an effort to help and support your friends and neighbors, especially those in difficult circumstances, while maintaining safety precautions. Act with a sense of solidarity!

Recommendations for employers or people responsible for others:

8. If any of your employees has a cold or has been in contact with a person infected with SARS-CoV-2, take the initiative to allow them to work remotely. This may help delay official quarantine measures.
9. Start introducing remote working as soon as possible. Don't

forget that commuting to and from work on crowded public transport puts your employees at high risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2 or flu. Remote working will help reduce overcrowding on public transport, especially at peak times.

10. At the same time, remember only to follow restrictions and rules which are grounded in the latest scientific information, rather than in your own personal beliefs or emotions.
11. Make sure any restrictions are communicated clearly and are simple to follow.
12. Excessive or incomprehensible restrictions are generally ignored, and may have the opposite effect to that intended.
13. It is key that you set a good example to your employees. If you fail to follow health & safety precautions or quarantine rules, your staff will follow your lead.

Recommendations for senior citizens and vulnerable individuals:

14. Avoid crowded places and try to keep contact with others to minimum, even your children and grandchildren.
15. Limit your social interactions.

Recommendations for all healthcare professionals:

16. Always remember that your job as a doctor, nurse, or other healthcare professional carries a certain responsibility. Never assume that the fight against COVID-19 does not concern you. By using personal protective equipment, you can continue caring for your patients. Whenever possible, promptly attend to any patients seeking care.

Remember: by following these recommendations, you are protecting yourself, your family and friends. If we all strictly adhere to them, we will be able to significantly lower the number of infections within two weeks. This will allow the healthcare system to cope more smoothly in the coming weeks and months, and will help prevent the avoidable deaths of COVID-19 patients and help avoid another lockdown.

However, if we do not follow these recommendations, we are endangering the lives of our families, friends and strangers, and risking an economic and social crisis in Poland. In turn, this means our irresponsible actions today will leave our children and coming generations with an unenviable future.

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polishtechnical@sigma-not.pl
 phone: +48 22 818 09 18
www.polishtechnicalreview.com