

Action for a Healthier Europe

While the emergency phase of the Covid-19 pandemic has been declared over, thanks to the rapid development and deployment of vaccines, the SARS-CoV-2 virus continues to inflict serious damage on our society and the health of our citizens.

- Covid-19 continues to infect large numbers of the population, with an expectation of 2-3 waves per year.
- Covid-19 has been directly implicated in a significant increase in strokes, heart disease, diabetes and many other diseases.
- Covid-19 has been shown to worsen brain health and increase risk for Alzheimers, Parkinsons, and other neurological diseases
- Millions of Europeans – including children - are currently suffering from Long Covid, and more people join their ranks every day.

Consequences

Around the world, long-term sickness is increasing significantly, leading to a high ongoing health burden, labour shortages and productivity problems.

- Sick days per worker have more than doubled
- Economically inactive individuals due to long-term sickness have increased more than 30%
- School attendance rates have dropped
- US Economists have calculated Long Covid has had an economic cost, in the US alone, of US\$3.7 trillion... and counting.
- By 2028, we can expect more than 2 in 3 adults to have contracted Long Covid, many of whom will not recover. More than 1 in 20 of them will have it severely enough that it limits their daily activities – nearly 10 million people in the EU alone. The burden of long-term sickness on health services and society will continue to increase.

We have solutions

The pandemic has led to leaps in our understanding of disease transmission. This new knowledge offers an opportunity to impact health now and for future generations, akin to the understanding of water-borne diseases and the development of antibiotics.

“Every European citizen has a right to indoor air quality (IAQ) that does not endanger their health. This is implicit in the basic right to grow up and live in healthy environments.”

HealthVent, European Commission under the Health Programme (2008-2013)

As acknowledged by the World Health Organisation, Covid-19 and many other infectious diseases are primarily spread indoors through airborne infectious respiratory particles. Following the discovery that many diseases, such as Cholera, are spread by pathogens floating in the water, societies around the world acted, and clean water is now a global health priority.

It is time to clean the air

The EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 promotes a “vision zero” of not just work-related deaths in the EU, but also *disease*. Given the state of current knowledge, the EU has an obligation to act on indoor airborne pathogens.

We call on the EU to:

- Acknowledge the impact of air-borne pathogens and their consequences, and in particular Covid-19 and Long Covid, on the health of the population.
- As soon as possible, Incorporate standards for the removal of pathogens in all Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) standards, to ensure safe working environments for all.

These standards should include:

- The monitoring of Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) in public indoor spaces and publishing of the data
- The importance of ventilation and fresh air in indoor environments
- The use of HEPA and MERV filters for removal of dangerous particles and pathogens

Further, the EU should:

- Act to implement IAQ guidelines as soon as possible – including pathogen removal - in schools and daycares to protect the health of future generations.
- Improve IAQ standards in healthcare to protect vulnerable patients and healthcare workers.
- Invest in the research and development of new technologies such as Far-UVC to safely and effectively remove airborne pathogens.

Implementation of these recommendations will have an immediate effect on the ongoing burden of Covid-19 and Long Covid and will additionally decrease the impact of all airborne diseases, both existing (e.g. influenza, colds, chickenpox, pertussis, tuberculosis etc) and future threats. Further, the impending threat of H5N1 (“bird flu”) demands urgent action by the EU and member states.