

Have we got used to the coronavirus?

Since the beginning of the pandemic in Germany, the BfR has been examining how people are living with the risk of “corona”.



How great is the concern among the general public? How do people assess the measures prescribed to contain the spread of the coronavirus? The BfR-Corona-Monitor has been providing an answer to this since March 2020. The long-term, representative study measures how the population in Germany perceives the risks associated with the novel coronavirus. Other studies on this topic focus, among other things, on psychological aspects, socio-economic factors and consequences of the pandemic.

At the beginning, 500 randomly selected people were interviewed by telephone every week for the Corona-Monitor; from June onwards it was 1,000 people every two weeks. The results are published on the BfR website shortly after each survey. An overview of the developments over time is also provided. Among other things, participants are asked how concerned they are about the impact on their physical health and their own economic situation, how they protect themselves and their families, what measures they think are useful and how well informed they feel.

Broad acceptance of social distancing, hygiene measures and face masks

“The vast majority of the population has recognised that they can protect themselves against the virus,” says psychologist Dr. Fabian Kirsch. Kirsch heads the BfR-Corona-Monitor together with Dr. Ann-Kathrin Lindemann. Both work in the BfR’s Risk Communication Department and are interested in the population’s risk perception of the novel coronavirus. Communication scientist Lindemann adds: “Since the pandemic reached Germany, approval of the state-ordered measures regarding distancing, hygiene and masks has been at a relatively high level.” Shortly after the nationwide introduction of mandatory masks,

this measure was rated as appropriate by 86 % of respondents in the survey dated 21 April 2020. “This is a remarkably high level of acceptance, considering that this was a measure prescribed that directly interferes with everyday life of many people,” says Kirsch.

Lindemann and Kirsch have observed changes in acceptance as the pandemic has progressed: Initially, 92 % rated contact restrictions as appropriate, whereas at the beginning of May, this value was just 67 %. After the measure was eased during the summer, acceptance increased again. At the end of November, 79 % considered the contact restrictions as appropriate.

The pandemic as part of everyday life

“To some extent, the population has now become accustomed to living with the pandemic. The usual protective measures have now become routine for many,” explains Lindemann. In the summer, at least 90 % of respondents already said that they wore covers for their mouth and nose, kept their distance and washed their hands more thoroughly. In autumn, most of the population still complies with these measures. The majority also regularly look for information about what is happening regarding the novel coronavirus. “This shows that the coronavirus has found its way into everyday life,” comments Kirsch on the results.

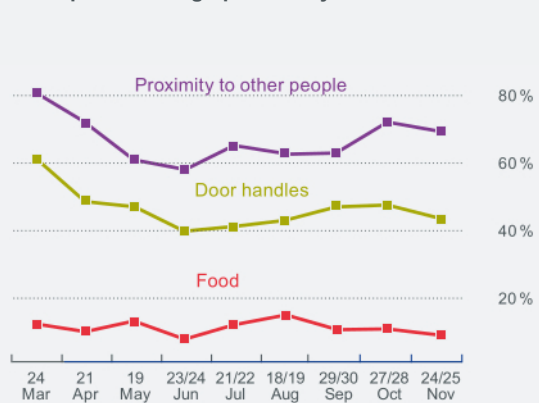
The BfR-Corona-Monitor is intended to accompany the population until the end of the pandemic in Germany. “Until, for example, the vaccine is approved and we can get used to a life after the pandemic again,” says Lindemann. ■

More information:
www.bfr.bund.de/en > Risk communication > BfR-Corona-Monitor

Infection via door handles?

In the beginning, the population was concerned about an infection via door handles. In the first survey dated 24 March 2020, 61 % of respondents rated the probability of becoming infected via door handles as high or very high. Coronaviruses can reach surfaces through an infected person sneezing or coughing directly on them and remain infectious there for some time. A smear infection to another person appears to be possible if the virus is transmitted shortly afterwards via the hands to the mucous membranes of the nose or eyes. However, it is almost impossible to scientifically trace this transmission route. The BfR is not aware of any infections via this route. According to the Robert Koch Institute, the novel coronavirus is mainly transmitted via droplets and aerosols.

Perception of a high probability of infection*



* How high or low do you estimate the probability of being infected with the novel coronavirus via the following paths? – Shown: response category “(very) high”, figures given in percentages, basis: 499–509 (March-May), 981–1,030 (since June) respondents