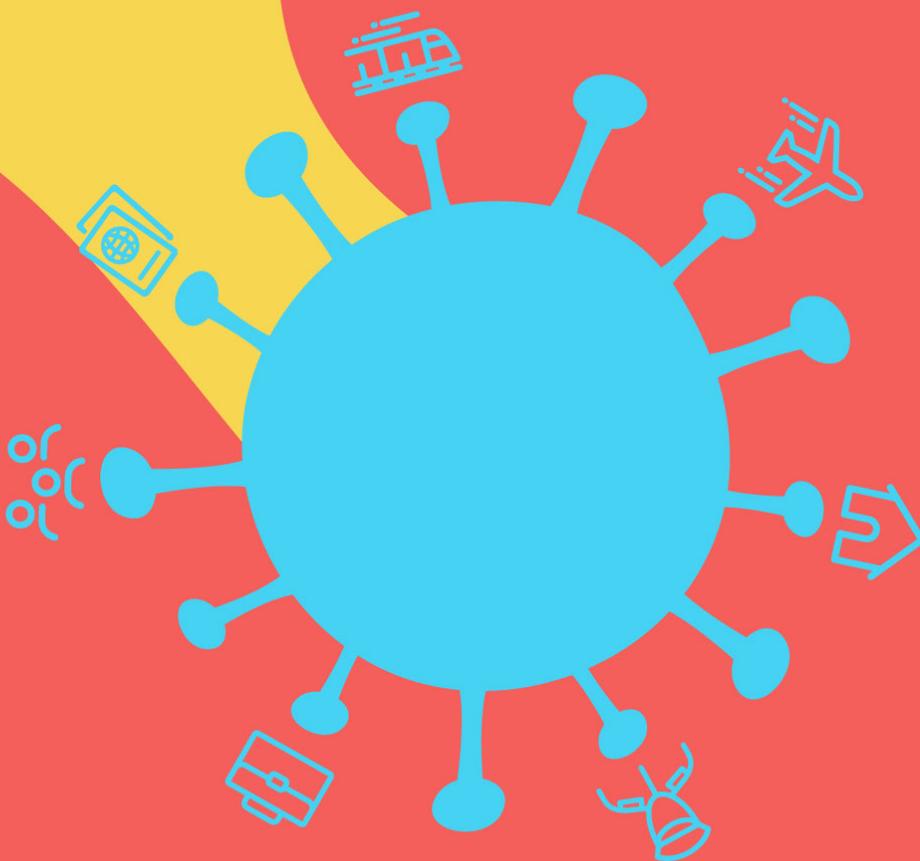
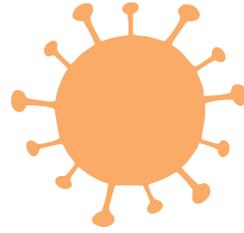


CORONAVIRUS IN BELARUS:

IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

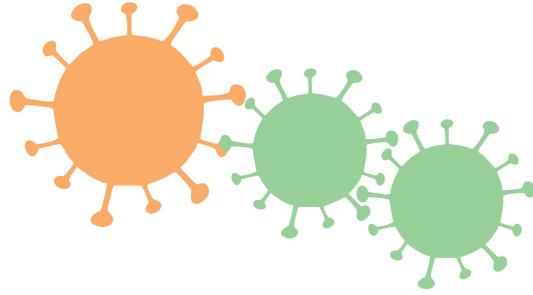


January-April 2021



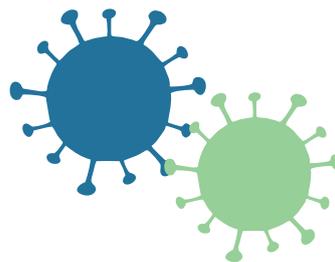
With the support of Human Constanta, in March 2020, covidmonitor.by was launched, a website that contains information on how the authorities in the Republic of Belarus respond to the situation with COVID-19. On the site you can see the chronology of statements, actions, reactions of government agencies. It also collects regulatory legal acts adopted by the state and expert opinions on certain actions. Every restriction imposed by the state must be legal, proportionate and non-discriminatory . Information is collected for history in order to further analyze and analyze everything that has been and has not been done.

In this report, we want to summarize and record the practice that has developed in Belarus during January — April 2021.



CONTENT

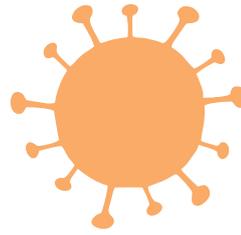
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INTRODUCTION

By the 30th of April, 358 738 people were registered with a positive test for COVID-19 in Belarus. 349 013 patients who had previously been diagnosed with COVID-19 recovered and were discharged. During the entire period of the spread of infection in the country, 2 542 patients died. By the 1st of January, 196 223 people were registered in Belarus with a positive test for COVID-19 (plus 162 515 for the reporting period). 178 102 patients recovered and were discharged (plus 170 911 for the period) who had previously been diagnosed with COVID-19. In the period from the 1st of January to the 30th of April 2021 1 109 patients died from the spread of coronavirus infection in the country.

Month	The number of confirmed diagnoses on the first day of the month	The number of confirmed diagnoses on the last day of the month	The dynamic of infection	The number of deaths in the reporting month
январь	196 223	248 336	+ 52 113	+ 285
февраль	249 295	287 306	+ 38 011	+ 248
март	288 267	321 807	+ 33 540	+ 262
апрель	323 043	358 738	+ 35 695	+ 285



CONCLUSIONS

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the country has not been quarantined, but the mask regime continued to operate during the reporting period. The authorities of the country recognized the presence of the third wave of coronavirus infection, but before, there was a contradictory trend in the context of tightening/weakening anti-epidemic measures.

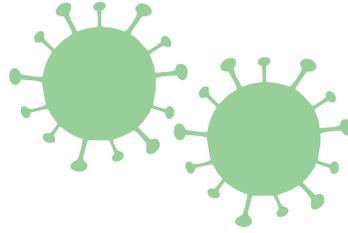
Since the beginning of January, Belarus has started vaccination with the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. The first to be vaccinated were employees of medical institutions and education. Mass vaccination began in April. So far, just over 1 % of the country's population has been fully vaccinated.

At the legislative level, separate acts were adopted that fixed support for subjects in the economic sphere. In particular, it extends the possibility of providing tax incentives for payments to local budgets and rent for land plots, a moratorium on increasing the basic rental amount, and a permission for the sale of over-the-counter medicines on the Internet. At the same time, the deadline for filing tax returns for individuals was not extended.

Employers were allowed to send employees on leave for self-isolation. At the same time, they must be paid, and the place where the employee should be at this time should be determined by the employer.

In “connection with the epidemiological situation”, the reception of parcels was prohibited for those administratively arrested in the IVS of the Minsk City Executive Committee GUV and the IVS in Zhodino, which put these people in an even more vulnerable position, leaving people without warm clothes in the cold season and without basic personal hygiene products.

The Ministry of Statistics has again and again delayed the publication of data on total mortality for 2020, which raises suspicions of a desire to hide the increase in mortality last year.



THE IMPACT ON EVERYDAY LIFE

The authorities formally acknowledged the presence of the third wave of activation of coronavirus infection, but the toughening of anti-epidemic measures didn't follow, as well as no quarantine was introduced.¹

The mask regime, which was introduced in November 2020, continued to operate throughout the country. Otherwise, the practice of different approaches to anti-epidemic measures, depending on the region, continued.

Thus, the chairman of the Brest City Executive Committee, Alexander Rogachuk, said that due to a certain improvement in the epidemiological situation in the city, *“since the 14th of January restrictions on the working hours of public catering facilities, facilities where recreation and entertainment services are provided, as well as gambling establishments have been lifted in Brest”*.²

The Mogilev administration has issued a plan of measures to prevent and reduce the spread of acute respiratory infections, including those caused by COVID-19, in the form of a decision. It became effective on the 2nd of April 2020.³ The deadline was specified *“until cancellation (taking into account the epidemiological situation)”*. Paragraph 17 of the plan was as follows: *“Ensure the operation of public catering facilities, entertainment facilities, including nightclubs, casinos, entertainment centers and others, from 08.00 to 23.00. Do not allow the provision of hookah services”*. This item was canceled. It was active almost for a year.

At the same time, the mask regime in Novopolotsk has been extended until 31st of May 2021.⁴ The basis is the decision of the Novopolotsk City Executive Committee from the 30th of April 2021 number 381. Masks should be worn not only by employees, but also by visitors to shops, shopping centers, public

¹ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/minzdrav-soobschil-o-nachale-tretjey-volny-covid-19-v-belarusi-436975-2021/>

² <https://interfax.by/news/obshchestvo/society-different/1289863/>

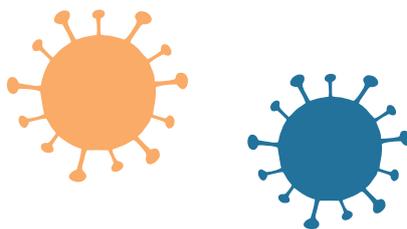
³ <https://news.tut.by/society/721926.html?c>

⁴ <https://news.tut.by/society/728828.html?c>

catering facilities (except for the time of direct meals). It remains mandatory to wear masks in any form of transport: buses, trams, minibuses and regular taxis. And also, in all objects of any form of ownership, where it is difficult or impossible to maintain social distancing.

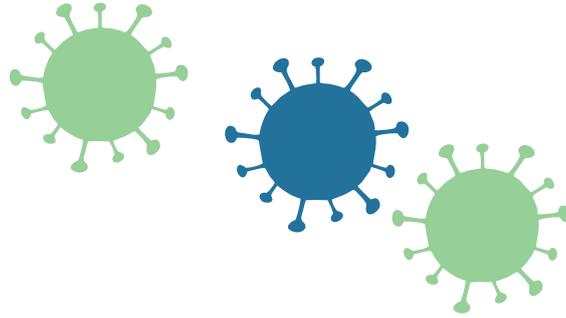
The Minsk City Executive Committee has made changes to the comprehensive plan of sanitary and anti-epidemic measures aimed at preventing the occurrence and spread of COVID-19 infection in the capital. The corresponding decision is published on the website of the Minsk City Executive Committee. In particular, item No. 21 of the comprehensive plan approved by the decision of the Minsk City Executive Committee No. 1069 on 7th of April 2020 has been changed. The new version states that *“to hold cultural, mass sports, sports events and competitions in objects (concert halls, theaters, circuses, cinemas, sports and sports institutions, etc.), provided that the venues are filled no more than 50 % of the maximum occupancy, use only seats, seating of spectators at a distance of at least 1–1,5 meters from each other”*.⁵ The sale of tickets is carried out taking into account the abovementioned conditions.

On the eve of the Christmas holidays, the Russian Orthodox Church reminded about the safety rules in the pandemic, which should not be forgotten. So, priests should wear a mask during confession and communion of the faithful, and ministers of churches-when walking around the temple.⁶



⁵ <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-minske-vvedeny-novye-ogranichenija-iz-za-sovid-19-436878-2021/>

⁶ <https://sputnik.by/religion/20210106/1046572617/V-tserkvi-tozhe-nuzhna-maski-RPTs-napomnila-pravila-bezopasnosti-v-pandemiyu.html>



VACCINATION

At the very end of 2020, vaccination against coronavirus began in Belarus. Therefore, the main topic of this period was vaccination. Among the first to get vaccinated were doctors, teachers—those who are in contact with a large number of people. We are not talking about children yet, doctors expect to receive the relevant protocols later.⁷ As of the beginning of February 2021, more than 91 % of those who signed up for the first stage of vaccination were vaccinated in the Brest region, 100 % in Vitebsk, 100 % in Gomel, 100 % in Grodno, 100 % in Minsk, 78 % in Minsk Oblast, and 94 % in Mogilev.⁸ Vaccination was carried out on a voluntary basis. The first to be vaccinated were health workers who are at risk. The Ministry of Health distributed the vaccine by region, depending on the applications of health institutions.

In February, Belarusian servicemen began to be vaccinated, while the ministry reported that *“the coronavirus infection didn't have a cardinal effect on the Armed Forces of Belarus. The level of morbidity of military personnel is comparable to the level of morbidity of citizens in the Republic of Belarus”*.⁹

As Deputy Chairman of the Minsk City Executive Committee Artyom Tsuran said during a live line on the 23rd of January vaccination against covid with the Russian drug Sputnik V is “on schedule”. *“The first stage provides for vaccination of the applied medical workers. For these purposes, the capital received more than 2000 doses. Vaccination of the health system will continue until the 1st of April”*, — Tsuran said.

He noted that this procedure has “certain features”: *“It is necessary to vaccinate five people at the same time. This is due to the volume of the drug provided and the peculiarities of its storage. In addition, there are quite strict criteria for*

⁷ <http://www.ctv.by/glavvrach-detskoy-infekcionnoy-bolnicy-minska-poka-vakcinaciya-ot-koronavirusa-detyam-ne-provoditsya>

⁸ <https://interfax.by/news/zdorove/raznoe/1291516/>

⁹ <https://interfax.by/news/obshchestvo/society-different/1292197/>

health conditions”. The second stage of vaccination will affect employees of education and social protection services.¹⁰

The vaccination procedure started not only in the capital, but also in other regions of the country.

According to the Minister of Health, vaccination of people who are not in the risk group began in April, when any Belarusian will be able to get vaccinated.¹¹

The Ministry of Health has decided to issue a certificate of vaccination to citizens who have been vaccinated against COVID-19. Due to the fact that the rules of international regulation and requirements for vaccination are still being formed, such a document may be necessary for Belarusian citizens to travel abroad. It will be issued at the request of a citizen planning to leave the country.

*“The certificate is issued at the point of vaccination on a paid basis at the request of a citizen who plans to travel outside the country during the year. The document will include information on the implementation of preventive vaccinations against COVID-19, confirming the implementation of vaccination-1 and vaccination-2”, — the Ministry of Health noted.*¹²

The document contains the following information: the name of the health organization, the date of birth of the person who received preventive vaccinations against COVID-19. The certificate, as well as the name of the vaccine, is filled in in Russian and English.

It is noted that according to the National Plan of Measures for Vaccination against COVID-19 infection in Belarus for 2021–2022, it is planned to vaccinate at least 60 % of the population both in the country as a whole and in each region. At the same time, at the end of April, according to the Ministry of Health, more than 111,4 thousand Belarusians, which is slightly more than one percent of the population of Belarus, received a full course of vaccination from two doses of coronavirus vaccinations.¹³

The Ministry of Health explained that vaccination forms the individual protection of the vaccinated person, prevents the occurrence of the disease, its severe course and unfavorable outcome. But if less than 60 % of the population

¹⁰ <https://naviny.online/new/20210123/1611399672-v-minske-formiruyut-spiski-uchiteley-i-socrabotnikov-zhelayushchih-privitsya>

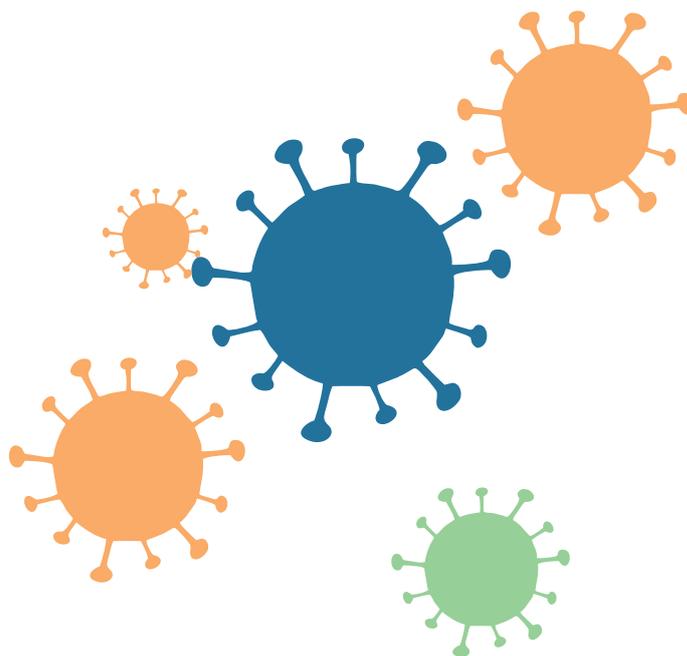
¹¹ <https://news.tut.by/society/715217.html>

¹² <https://www.belta.by/society/view/v-belarusi-nachnut-vydavat-sertifikat-o-vaktsinatsii-protiv-covid-19-438921-2021/>

¹³ <https://sputnik.by/health/20210430/1047524761/Pervyy-komponent-vaktsiny-ot-koronavirusa-poluchili-lish-3-belorusov.html>

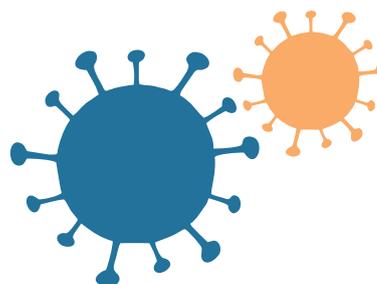
is vaccinated, it will not be possible to form a collective defense and affect the intensity of the spread of the virus. Currently, research continues to be conducted, so when new data is obtained, it is possible to change the task. At the same time, the total number of people who plan to vaccinate in the country by the fall is 4 million people.¹⁴

In April of 2021, the Sputnik V vaccine (Gam Covid Vac), which was bottled at RUE Belmedpreparaty, was approved by the Ministry of Health. The decision was made based on the results of a comprehensive expert assessment of the materials of the registration dossier, conducted by specialists of the UP CEIZ, the RNPC of Microbiology and Epidemiology — Quality control was carried out by the Gamalei Russian Center together with RUE “Belmedpreparaty”.¹⁵ It is planned that the volume of the vaccine produced at the Belarusian enterprise will be up to 500 thousand doses per month.



¹⁴ <https://interfax.by/news/zdorove/meduslugi/1294234/>

¹⁵ <https://news.tut.by/society/726581.html?c>



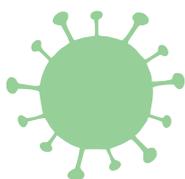
IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

In January, amendments were made to Decree No. 143 the 24th of April 2020 “On Supporting the Economy”. In particular, it extends the possibility of providing tax incentives for payments to local budgets and rent for land plots, a moratorium on increasing the basic rental amount, and a permit for the sale of over-the-counter medicines on the Internet.

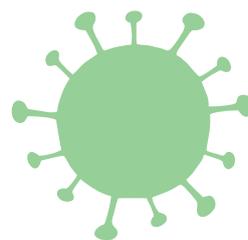
The deadline for granting installments for repayment of lease payments under deferrals granted in the second and third quarters of 2020 has been postponed to the first half of 2021, and new deferrals are also being granted in the first half of 2021 with installments for repayment of obligations until the end of 2021.

In addition, the list of economic activities that are most exposed to the adverse impact of the epidemiological situation is supplemented by activities for showing films. Organizations are granted the right, in consultation with the owners, to make decisions on the non-inventory of the property that is on the accounting register.

In Belarus in 2020 the deadline for filing income tax returns and paying it was postponed due to the epidemiological situation. However, these deadlines were not postponed in 2021. You must file a tax return for 2020 no later than the 31st of March 2021 and pay the tax no later than the 1st of June.¹⁶



¹⁶ <https://finance.tut.by/news723229.html?c>



IMPACT ON WORK

Additional rights due to the negative impact of the epidemiological situation were granted to employers. They may grant the employee, with his consent, leave to remain in self-isolation, declare inactivity without limiting its total duration during the calendar year, include in the working year for which the labor leave is granted, the time of statutory leave without pay provided at the initiative of the employer, as well as release the employee from work due to his sick condition without pay for up to three calendar days in total during the term of the decree.¹⁷

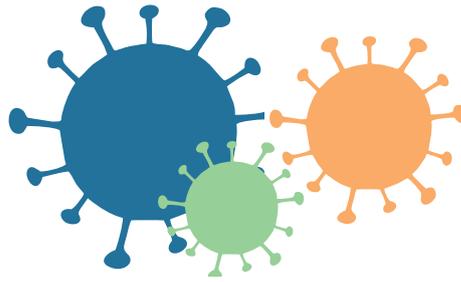
Due to the unfavorable epidemiological situation, employers were allowed to send employees on leave for self-isolation. At the same time, they must be paid, and the place where the employee should be at this time should be determined by the employer. The Ministry of Labor clarifies that this innovation is the right of the employer, and not a duty. That is, the employer can make such decisions at its own discretion. One of the main conditions — with the consent of the employee.¹⁸

The Minsk City Executive Committee decided that the vaccination of labor collectives in the capital will take place right at the enterprises. According to the head of the city Vladimir Kukharev, such a method for large teams will be more convenient than sending employees to the vaccination offices of city polyclinics.¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-prodlil-dejstvie-mer-po-podderzhke-ekonomiki-vo-vremja-pandemii-423142-2021/>

¹⁸ <https://finance.tut.by/news714688.html?c>

¹⁹ <https://www.belta.by/regions/view/v-minske-vaktsinirovat-trudovye-kollektivy-ot-covid-19-budut-s-vyezdom-na-predpriyatija-437905-2021/>



IMPACT ON SELECTED VULNERABLE GROUPS

PEOPLE SERVING ADMINISTRATIVE ARRESTS

In January 2021 the management of the Center for the Isolation of Offenders (CIP), the Temporary Detention Facility (IVS) on Akrestina Street and the IVS in Zhodino announced a prohibition on receiving parcels for administrative detainees. According to the official justification, this decision was made “*in order to ensure safety and reduce the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 on the territory of Belarus*”.²⁰

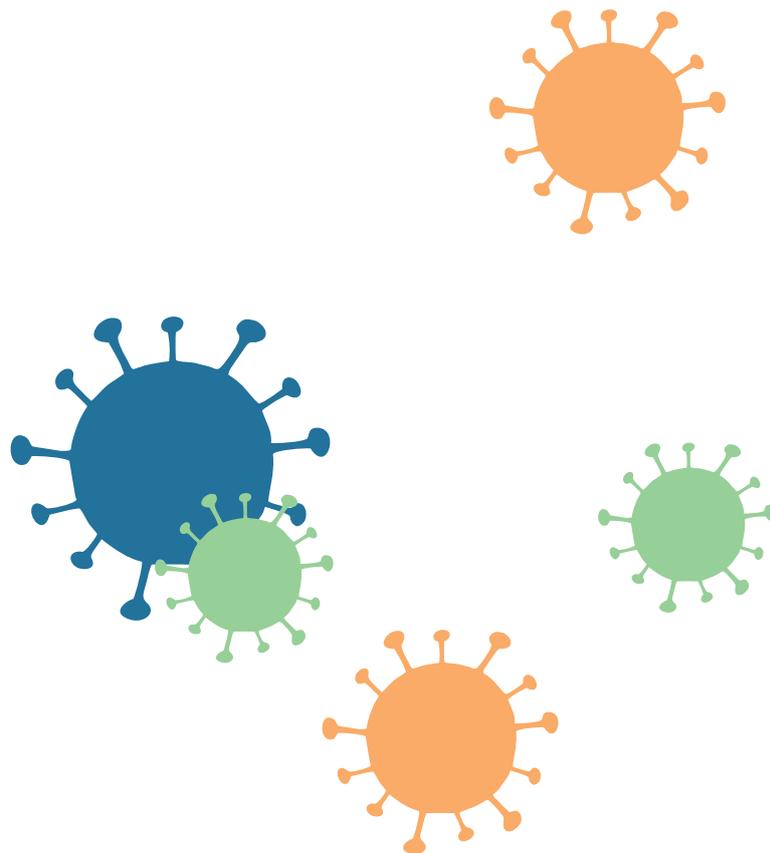
However, the right to receive parcels is provided for in Article 18.7 of the Code of Administrative Offences (PICoAP). No decisions or regulations may worsen the situation of administrative detainees in comparison with those described in the PICoAP (Article 18.3, paragraph 2). Also, the internal regulations of places of serving administrative arrest provide for a closed list of cases in which parcels are not accepted and returned to the carrier. And the reason announced by the administrations of the institutions is not indicated there.

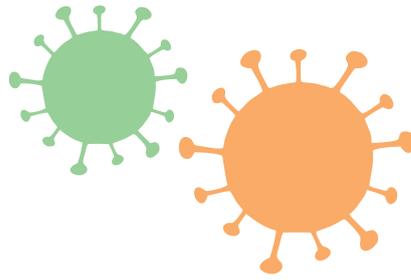
There is no causal link between the restriction of transmission and the spread of infection in the country. In addition, no other measures are taken in the detention centers to counteract the disease of people: the cells are overcrowded, personal protective equipment is not issued, and people are moved from one cell to another while serving their sentences. There is no public information that testing is being conducted inside institutions to identify people with COVID-19 and prevent the spread of the disease.

²⁰ <https://people.onliner.by/2021/01/07/ivs-prinamaet-tolko-lekarstva>

It looked especially tough against the background of frosts, when people cannot get warm clothes and the necessary vitamins. The lack of replacement clothing and hygiene products creates unsanitary conditions, which contributes to an increase in the incidence of diseases, including COVID-19, since it is impossible to get personal protective equipment. Thus, the prohibition of transmission can contribute to the increase in morbidity. Since institutions do not provide drinking water, the ban on parcels completely deprives people of access to safe drinking water. All this creates cruel and inhuman conditions and contradicts Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which Belarus has joined.

Later in mid-February, the reception of parcels resumed, but in a limited format — once a week, which does not completely solve the problem.





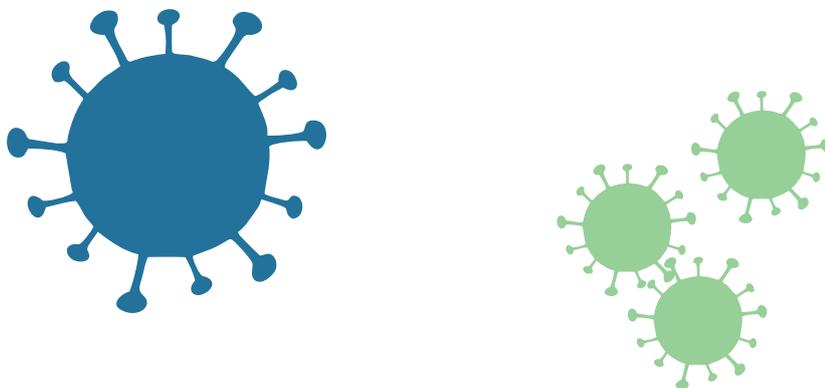
ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Belstat delay the publication of mortality statistics in Belarus. Traditionally, data for the previous year was published in early April. The calendar plans for the release of data on the Belstat website indicated that the latest death rates in Minsk and the regions of Belarus will be published in April 2021. However, at the end of March, information about the publication on mortality indicators disappeared.

Then there was information that the publication will take place on the 16th of April. But this date was changed to the 17th of May. The last time Belstat published mortality statistics was on the 12th of May 2020.

There are suspicions that in 2020 there will be a large increase in mortality compared to the previous year. And official statistics on COVID-19 deaths will not be able to explain this discrepancy.

So far, it is known that the population of Belarus in 2020 decreased by almost 60,7 thousand people. In 2020, the country's population decreased by 41,7 thousand people more than a year earlier. But these figures include not only the dead, but also those who left Belarus.²¹



²¹ <https://thinktanks.by/publication/2021/04/15/belstat-na-mesyats-perenes-publikatsiyu-dannyh-o-smertnosti-za-2020-god.html>

Human Constanta — is a Belarusian human rights organization. We were registered in 2016 in Minsk. We work with human rights in three main areas:

- Protection of the rights of foreign citizens and stateless persons.
- Promotion of anti-discrimination and human rights education.
- Digital freedoms and rights.

Our mission

To promote public interests and joint actions in response to modern challenges in the field of human rights in Belarus.

What are we doing?

- Help others to protect their rights.
- We compare Belarusian laws and practices with the best foreign examples and human rights standards.
- We share this knowledge through awareness-raising and educational activities.

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