

COVID-19 update 62 – 11-26/03/2021

A compilation of press releases/articles on policies and best practices from various EU and national information sources, and information provided by our members

⇒ **Please note that this update is published on a 2-week basis.**

COVID-19 self-test for selling in supermarkets: Which one to choose?

In Germany, the sales of COVID-19 antigen self-tests in supermarkets and drugstores is now allowed. On 6th March, Aldi and Lidl were the first to offer antigen self-tests in their stores. Consumers raided stores for the test, which were sold out immediately.

The antigen self-tests currently sold at Aldi and Lidl are **antigen tests**, which are exceptionally approved in Germany by the Ministry of Health. These tests are only 50 percent reliable. At best, they allow a snapshot. The German Ministry of Health can cancel its approval at any time. If this happens, the free sales will be forbidden again. Antigen tests are cheap. They cost typically around 0,90 USD per piece.

Another type of test is the **antibody Test** from Swiss-based manufacturer LOMINA. These tests can be sold in supermarkets. The LOMINA antibody tests are regularly approved in the EU under 98/79/EC Annex III part 6. That means the tests are not subjected anymore to national approvals. Any retailer can be 100% confident the tests will stay on the market and nobody can stop its sales. Until 12th March, only 4 manufacturers obtained the certificate to produce these tests, from which LOMINA was the first one. Antibody tests are more accurate than antigen test, but also not fully reliable. (Source: EMD)

EU study on the behaviour of consumers in 2020

[The results of a survey](#) conducted for the European Commission at the end of 2020 illustrate the impact the COVID-19 crisis had on consumption patterns, with consumers shopping closer to home or supporting local businesses. At the same time, consumers made 'greener' choices, they were willing to pay more for a product that is more durable.

Some of the main findings:

- 71% of consumers shopped online in 2020.
- On average 38% of Europeans were concerned about paying their bills the following month. The difference between Member States was significant: Citizens' financial concerns ranged from 7% to 71%. More information is available [here](#).
- 42% of consumers considered postponing a major purchase and 80% would not make any travel plans until the situation was back to normal in their country.
- 56% of consumers said environmental concerns influenced their purchasing decisions and 67% said that they bought products that were better for the environment, even if such products were more expensive. Another 81% shopped closer to home and supported local businesses.
- Other variables were not impacted by the crisis compared to previous surveys. For example, the level of consumer trust in retailers remained high (at 80%), extensive

knowledge of consumer rights remained low (at 27%) and the share of consumers confronted with a purchasing problem for which they felt they could legitimately complain remained low (at 23%).

The findings are part of a new [Consumer Conditions Scoreboard](#) and will feed into further actions by the Commission to ensure that consumers play their full part in the [EU economic recovery](#) and [green and digital transitions](#), as set out in the [New Consumer Agenda](#) launched at the end of 2020.

FMCG Gurus research

Three quarters (76%) of European consumers say that they plan to eat and drink more healthily in the future as a result of COVID-19, new research by [FMCG Gurus](#) has found.

According to the research, which was conducted in February 2021, some 58% of consumers are concerned about a third wave of the virus occurring, while 19% believe it is something that will continue to impact day-to-day life for ‘several years’.

“As a result, consumers will remain conscious about the virus and the potential impact it can have on their health”, FMCG Gurus said.

More than two fifths are seeking out functional food and drink products more frequently as a result of the pandemic, the research showed, with ingredient-led claims gaining greater traction. For example, of those that plan to eat or drink more healthily, some 60% say that they plan to reduce their sugar intake.

According to FMCG Gurus, this is likely to bolster demand for products that they deem to be tasty, ‘guilt-free’, and nutritious at the same time. “When launching such products, it is important not to over-promote ingredient claims at the expense of sensory appeal”, FMCG Gurus said. “Indeed, the desire to turn to comfort products for moments of escapism is a key driver of food and drink occasions, and consumers will not want products deemed too functional if they associate them with compromised taste.”

At the same time, however, consumers are displaying somewhat contradictory attitudes when it comes to their pandemic eating and drinking habits. While consumers are making attempts to eat and drink more healthily, 43% say that they are also turning to comfort food and drink more frequently to deal with the pressures of everyday life, FMCG Gurus found. Close to half (47%) of respondents also added that they have become more conscious about their mental wellbeing, due to the high levels of uncertainty about the virus, the health and wellbeing of loved ones, and future job prospects. (Source: [ESM](#))

1. EU MEASURES

Under the [State Aid Temporary Framework](#), the Commission has recently approved:

- an amended €3 billion [Dutch scheme](#) to support companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak;
- €15,8 million [Estonian schemes](#) to support farmers affected by the coronavirus outbreak;
- a €1,1 billion [Polish scheme](#) to further support companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak;

- a €1,5 million [Slovenian scheme](#) to support holders of ancillary activities at farms in the context of the coronavirus outbreak;
- the modification of [Spanish schemes](#), including €10 billion budget increase for aid of a limited amount, to further support economy in the context of the coronavirus outbreak.

On 11th March the European Commission [has proposed](#) a package of almost €530 million in additional financial support under the [EU Solidarity Fund](#) (EUSF) to contribute to the efforts deployed by 17 Member States and three accession countries to safeguard public health in fighting the coronavirus. This funding will support part of their public expenditure on medical and personal protective equipment, emergency support to the population, and measures of prevention, monitoring and control of the spread of the disease. The aid package also includes the €132,7 million of advance payments [already received](#) by Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Hungary and Portugal. The mobilisation of the EUSF final payments to the 17 Member States is based on a thorough assessment of the applications submitted. The proposed financial contribution needs to be approved by the European Parliament and the Council before the financial aid can be disbursed. More information is available [here](#).

On 16th March the European Commission [disbursed](#) an additional €9 billion to seven EU Member States in the fifth instalment of financial support to Member States under the [SURE instrument](#), which is aimed at protecting people in their work and jobs affected by the corona crisis. These loans will assist Member States in addressing sudden increases in public expenditure to preserve employment. Specifically, they will help Member States cover the costs directly related to the financing of national short-time work schemes, and other similar measures that they have put in place as a response to the coronavirus pandemic, including for the self-employed. So far, 16 Member States have received a total of €62,5 billion under the SURE instrument in [back-to-back loans](#). An overview of the amounts disbursed up to date and the different maturities of the bonds are available online [here](#). Overall, the Commission has so far proposed a total of €90,6 billion in financial support to 19 Member States, of which €90,3 billion for 18 Member States have been authorised. In addition, Member States can still submit requests to receive financial support under SURE, which has an overall firepower of up to €100 billion.

In a [Communication](#), ahead of the meeting of European leaders on 25th March, the Commission is calling on Member States to prepare for a [coordinated approach to a gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions](#) when the epidemiological situation will allow. This includes the deployment of a Digital Green Certificate covering vaccination, testing and recovery; the use of a common framework for response measures; guidance on additional testing strategies, including wastewater monitoring to track variants; investment in diagnostics and treatments. The Communication also highlights actions to build global resilience through COVAX and an EU vaccine sharing mechanism.

The EU set up a European bio-defence preparedness plan “HERA Incubator” against COVID-19 variants to bring together researchers, biotech companies, manufacturers, regulators and public authorities to monitor variants, exchange data and cooperate on adapting vaccines. Over the longer-term, the EU must also put in place a stronger framework for resilience and

preparedness in the eventuality of future pandemics. This is already the objective of the proposals for a European Health Union.

The European Parliament and the Council should rapidly reach an agreement on the proposal for a Digital Green Certificate and on an approach to a safe opening based on a solid scientific framework. The European Commission will continue supporting the ramping up of vaccines production, and pursue technical solutions to increase interoperability of national systems to exchange data. Member States should accelerate vaccination programmes, ensure that temporary restrictions are proportionate and non-discriminatory, designate contact points to collaborate on wastewater surveillance and report on efforts made, and launch the technical implementation of the Digital Green Certificates in view of the fast-tracked adoption of the proposal.

2. NATIONAL MEASURES

For information on the current **provisions regarding the crossing of Single Market borders**, please consult the Commission's [Re-open EU](#) web portal.

BELGIUM

The consultation committee of 24th March took new measures to fight against the progression of the still worrying figures of the epidemic and recommended the closure of non-essential businesses again as of 26th March at 10 p.m.

Purchases must be made by appointment. Shopping at most two customers from the same domestic bubble will remain possible, as has been the case for some time now in the Netherlands, for example. Deliveries and click and collect remain authorized. (Source: [RTBF](#))

Carrefour Belgium has managed a platform putting local producers in direct contact with stores located nearby. To allow the Horeca to reinvent itself in times of crisis, the brand now makes this platform available to restaurateurs who want to sell their meals in its 460 Hyper and Market stores. This offer can run for several years if need be. It is a "light" contract between the restaurateur and Carrefour whereby Carrefour only takes a small margin of the price which corresponds to the logistics. To join this initiative, restaurateurs must comply with certain retail rules, including: obtaining authorization from the AFSCA for marketing, comply with labelling standards and have the ability to generate barcodes. The restaurateurs set the price of the dishes sold in stores and they can collect any unsold products. Interested restaurateurs can submit their request to the Carrefour store manager closest to their establishment. Each store can include products from two restaurateurs in its offer, but without limiting the number of dishes per establishment. (Source: [Sudinfo](#))

The COVID-19 crisis has, rather counter-intuitively, hit the total Belgian e-commerce market hard last year, BeCommerce reports. While more Belgians found their way to online shops, increasing online purchases by 12%, the purchases were smaller, reducing the total turnover by 10% compared to 2019. Total turnover in the Belgian e-commerce sector dropped to 10,26 billion euros. The decrease is entirely due to the collapse of the services sector: due to the lockdowns and other measures, customers bought far fewer travel and tickets for attractions and events. The crisis boosted online sales of physical items, growing by a third to 7,5 billion euros. Consumers bought significantly more electronic products (+ 90%) and computer accessories (+ 66%), as many people were forced to work from home. 200.000 people found their way to an online store for the first time. (Source: [RetailDetail](#))

BULGARIA

The Ministry of Health has ordered the following measures with regard to the retail and horeca sectors, effective from 22nd March to 31st March 2021:

- Visits to all restaurants, fast food establishments, cafes, and bars are suspended. Only take away and home deliveries are allowed. At hotels, owners must arrange for guests to be served in their rooms.
- Establishment in shopping malls are closed with the exception of grocery stores, pharmacies, opticians, pet stores, banks, insurance company offices, and telecom operator's stores.
- Grocery stores and pharmacies remain open. Between 8.30-10.30 a.m. only customers over the age of 65 are allowed. (Source: [Visit Sofia](#))

DENMARK

Denmark, which has been under a partial lockdown for the last three months, says it will reopen most of society once everyone over 50 years old are vaccinated, which should be by the end of May. In the country of 5,8 million inhabitants, the numbers of new cases are one fourth of what was recorded in December when the government decided to lock down, in contrast to other European countries currently seeing rising cases again. The plan for a return to normal sees schools and universities, shops, restaurants and bars, libraries, museums and cinemas gradually reopen over a period of two months. However, the government remained vague on when major sporting and cultural events could see audiences return. (Source: [mint](#))

ESTONIA

Wearing masks in public indoor spaces is mandatory. A 2m² per person rule applies both inside and outside. All shops, except for pharmacies, grocery stores, pet stores, eyewear stores and other essential services must be closed and can only be open if delivery of goods or drive-in sales are an option. Services can continue their activities, but must stick to 25 percent of the room capacity. (Source: [VisitEstonia](#))

FINLAND

The Government [proposed](#) that the closure of restaurants continues for another three weeks until 18th April. Parliament will consider the Government's proposal, after which it is intended to enter into force as soon as possible. (Source: De Havilland)

FRANCE

The Director General of Health, Jérôme Salomon, declared that self-tests would in principle be available this week in pharmacies and perhaps in supermarkets. The question is how to trigger the contact tracing device. The High Authority for Health will set the conditions for approval of the self-testing kits to be used oneself, prior to their authorization by the

government. The question of the reimbursement of the tests is under study. Retailers are keen to distribute the tests. (Source: [LSA](#))

The French government announced on 18th March a new four-week confinement in Île-de-France and Hauts-de-France, two regions particularly affected by the worsening of the epidemic due to the coronavirus observed throughout France. This confinement, which came into force on 19th March at midnight, also concerns the departments of Alpes-Maritimes, Eure and Seine-Maritime. New massive braking measures were imposed in 16 departments. Stores and department stores that do not sell essential goods and services have to close. For the sake of fairness, the sales restrictions apply to the same products whether they are sold in a department store, a specialized store or a small downtown business. Bookstores and record stores are able to remain open, being henceforth categorized as “of first necessity”. Finally, the curfew is delayed in the whole of mainland France from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., in order to take into account the change to summer time. (Source: [RTBF](#))

The **Super U** in Franqueville-Saint-Pierre in Normandy is the **first French store to provide its customers with 100% decontaminated trolleys** thanks to a Mobile Decontamination Unit (UMD'Labs) of Lab'Science. Every day, it completely decontaminates hundreds of trolleys using a scientifically proven technique offered by Lab'Science to its customers in the medical and pharmaceutical world, to ensure full decontamination of their facilities or equipment. In just 1 hour, Super U staff were trained in the use of UMD'Labs. The project will allow to test the solution for controlling biological risks in a real environment. UMD'Labs runs in cycles of 30 to 40 minutes, decontaminating up to 60 carts at a time. If the duration of the cycle varies, its efficiency remains constant, with a germicidal action on 100% of the germs present on the trolleys. UMD'Labs is available for rent. The estimated cost of decontamination per cart is in the order of 20 cents. (Source: [LSA](#))

Things are going pretty well for food brands in France, and even better for groups of independent retailers than for integrated chains. According to Iri, convenience store sales gained 1,1 billion euros in 2020 (+ 8,6%). The same goes for supermarkets, which made 1 billion more last year (+ 5%). Carrefour France, penalized by its hypermarkets, posted sales at + 1,5% in 2020, boosted by the 6,8% increase in turnover for its supermarkets (50% franchised) and 8,3% its proximity (99% franchised). At Intermarché, non-gasoline sales of its 1.550 independently operated stores jumped 7 to 8% according, garnering nearly 900 million euros in additional revenue. For Franprix (two-thirds of franchisees in its 870 stores including master franchisees), growth reached 7,1% on a comparable basis, to 1,6 billion. More rural but even more franchised, Casino Proximités gained 10,3% on a comparable basis, to 1,4 billion. And the group plans to open 300 new franchise stores in 2021.

As for non-food brands, the situation is less rosy. From confinements to closures and then to curfews, they have suffered the full brunt of the consequences of the pandemic. Recent measures to close shopping centres over 20.000 m² and then over 10.000 m² are not helping. Sales of personal care are down 18 to 23%. Culture, toys and optics hold up slightly better (between -13% and -9%), while the home, specialized food and sport report declines estimated between -5% and -3%. In its annual report, the federation Procos recalls that last year, 63 brands announced 2.230 store closures, cutting 7.800 jobs. And since the start of the year, it has seen a 13% drop in sales in the sector, with -25% in February.

However, it seems that there is a premium to franchisees and freelancers of specialized brands. “Even in fragile sectors such as beauty, some of our members score remarkably well”, notes **Alexandra Bouthelier, FCA General Delegate**. According to the French Franchise

Federation FFF, three quarters of those polled saw their turnover decrease or not increase in 2020. But 42% expect to regain their turnover before this year is over. And above all, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents (87,8%) consider that being a franchisee is an asset in times of crisis. (Source: [LSA](#))

GERMANY

The non-essential stationary retailers are still undecided with regard to shopping with an appointment (Click & Meet), which since very recently has been possible in many places in Germany. As the German Retail Federation (HDE) reports from [a survey of more than 1.100 companies](#), more than 90 percent of retailers want to offer their customers Click & Meet. Almost a quarter of those surveyed, however, saw only minor sales effects with high effort and high costs. 13 percent consider Click & Meet to be a pure loss-making business. However, 41 percent of retailers see Click & Meet as positive with slight sales effects, 12 percent even as very positive with significant sales effects. (Source: [e-tailment](#))

From August to December 2020, consumers made significantly more purchases in Germany. According to the Federal Statistical Office, the reason for this is the **reduction in VAT**. The federal government lowered the VAT rates in the second half of 2020 from 19 to 16 percent and from 7 to 5 percent. Families with children and high earners in particular used the VAT reduction for additional or early purchases. More than every second eligible household used the additional **child bonus of 300 euros** in whole or in part for consumer purposes. Economists rate the billions in aid differently. “The combination of both measures has proven to be an effective policy to stimulate consumption after the first corona wave and thus contributed to an economic recovery effect”, said Martin Beznoska from the employer-related Institute of the German Economy (IW). From the child bonus, which cost around 4,3 billion euros, 2,3 billion euros flowed directly back into the economic cycle. “The reduction in VAT has not only led to larger purchases, but has also helped households with everyday expenses”. In some crisis-ridden industries such as the catering industry, the tax cut was only partially passed on to consumers and thus contributed to supporting businesses.

The union-affiliated Institute for Macroeconomics and Business Cycle Research (IMK) sees the measures more critically. The early purchases are missing in the current first quarter, said its scientific director Sebastian Dullien. The reduction in value added tax was “not an ideal means of increasing consumption”, especially in view of the fiscal costs of around 20 billion euros. “The child bonus seems much more targeted here”. This stimulates consumption and not only brings it forward, which is more sensible in terms of economic policy. Since the child bonus is reduced with high incomes, it is also more socially targeted. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

If the lockdown in the retail sector continues, there is a risk, according to the German Retail Federation (HDE), that there will be a loss of up to 120.000 stores in the Federal Republic. In a letter the HDE appealed to Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) to “initiate a long overdue change in strategy for combating pandemics”. The HDE complained that retailers are currently being asked to make a special sacrifice for the general goal of reducing contact, without being adequately compensated for it. The cities, parks and green spaces are full of people, the streets are full, many companies are working normally, only retail, restaurants and hotels are still closed. This everyday picture makes the affected retailers angry and desperate, wrote the HDE President. Concern for exponential growth in infections as a result of the British variant

of the virus is however likely to lead to an even more stricter regime than an easing of the rules. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

And indeed, on 24th March, confinement in Germany was extended until 18th April to contain a new wave of coronavirus infections. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the leaders of the German federated states reached an agreement overnight which also provides for the closure of shops and the cancellation of religious services during the Easter weekend, from 1st to 5th April. The country did however not install a federation-wide curfew. Bars and restaurants and non-essential shops remain closed. Everywhere in the country the FFP2 mask is mandatory in public places. (Source: [RTBF](#))

HUNGARY

In order to protect all lives during the pandemic, the following restrictive measures will be in force from 8th March until 24th March:

- All non-essential shops must remain closed;
- A curfew remains in place between 8.00 p.m. and 5 a.m.;
- Obligatory, universal mask-wearing;
- Restaurants remain closed except for takeout and delivery.

The wage support and tax benefit program already in place for hotels, bars and restaurants will be extended to cover all shops and services that need to close. (Source: [About Hungary](#))

ITALY

The Italian government has decided to close shops, restaurants and schools again from 15th March in an attempt to tackle a third wave of COVID-19 infections. Residents will be required to stay home except for work, health or other essential reasons. In the last seven days, Italy has recorded more than 150.000 coronavirus cases. (Source: DeHavilland)

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg has introduced a curfew between 11.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. which will remain in force until 2nd April. However, businesses, including non-essential businesses, are once again open to the public. This reopening is accompanied by new health rules. A limitation of one customer per 10m² applies to any commercial operation accessible to the public, regardless of its sales area. Small businesses with a sales area of less than 20m² can however accommodate a maximum of two customers at the same time.

Restaurants, bars and cafes are closed to the public. However, this closure does not concern school and university canteens. Take-out, drive-through and door-to-door delivery services are also possible. Hotels and other accommodation establishments remain open. Their restaurants and bars, however, are closed to the public, while room service and take-out service are available. (Source: [RTBF](#))

NORWAY

Until 9th April all shops must remain closed, apart from those on the national list of exempt retail outlets, such as food stores, pharmacies and Vinmonopol shops. The following shops may remain open, even if they are located in shopping centres:

- grocery stores (kiosks, health food stores and other shops that mainly offer food are also defined as grocery stores);
- pharmacies;
- petrol stations;
- outlets selling pet food and other necessities for pets;
- outlets selling products for agriculture and animal husbandry;
- warehouses and the wholesale-sections of shops that supply carpenters, electricians, plumbers, painters and similar crafts;
- outlets selling nursing and health care supplies (bandagists);
- opticians;
- Vinmonopolet;
- flower shops under 250 sqm.

Shops, shopping centres and other places of business must ensure that the number of people in the premises is restricted so that everyone can maintain a distance of at least two metres. If necessary, a person must be designated to ensure compliance with this requirement. Shopping centre management must take measures to prevent people from staying in the communal areas. (Source: [Oslo](#))

THE NETHERLANDS

Since Saturday 23rd January, the Netherlands has extended the curfew from 9 p.m. to 4.30 a.m. until 31st March. Since 3rd March all non-essential businesses can welcome visitors by appointment only. It is also possible to order take-out goods. There must be 4 hours between ordering and receiving the item. Evening sales are cancelled. Wearing a mask remains compulsory for anyone over the age of 13 in closed public spaces.

All bars and restaurants (including coffee shops) are closed. Delivery services as well as take-out catering remain authorized. The sale, delivery or consumption of alcohol in outside public places is prohibited between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. Take-out restaurants must close at 1.00 a.m. at the latest. Hotels remain open, but restaurants and room services within hotels are closed. Discos and nightclubs remain closed. (Source: [RTBF](#))

POLAND

On 18th March Poland's President, Andrzej Duda, has announced a tough new nationwide lockdown amid infections surging to the highest rate since November. Shopping centres, theatres, cinemas and hotels will close from 20th March, while schools will have to switch to online learning. Adam Niedzielski added that Poland could see more than 30.000 new daily coronavirus cases starting on 22nd March if the trend continues. (Source: [euobserver](#))

PORTUGAL

Portugal's government announced on Thursday 11th March it would start to gradually ease its strict rules from 15th March. The timeline for re-opening is: Kindergartens, pre-schools and primary schools will reopen on 15 March, as well as hair salons, libraries and bookshops. Cafes' terraces, museums, and small stores will open doors on 5 April. High school and university students will be able to return to school on 19 April, when cinemas, theatres and shopping malls will also reopen. Outdoor events will be allowed under capacity rules. (Source: DeHavilland)

SLOVENIA

On 10th March, the Government extended the majority of coronavirus restrictions by another week. The one relaxation the government opted for is allowing all construction services to reopen as of 15 March without the need for workers to be tested. (Source: DeHavilland)