

Statement of the Council of The Learned Society of the Czech Republic in regard to the current handling of COVID-19 pandemic

With great concern we watch extensive spreading of COVID-19 infection in Czech population. It turned out that the government's decision to loosen anti-pandemic measures at the end of the first wave of the pandemic was a mistake, consequences of which will follow us in the next weeks and months. They will have significant impact not only on the state of health of citizens, but also on the operation of health-care facilities, businesses, authorities and cultural facilities, and they will also have great economic impact.

We believe that the current situation is a consequence of a combination of insufficient procuring of services of experienced experts from the areas of hygiene, epidemiology and infectious medicine and also the fact that responsible state authorities in some areas succumbed to the pressure of lobbying structures or those who are now experts in areas of epidemiology or infectious medicine. We also consider it inappropriate that crucial decisions in such complex matters, like anti-pandemic measures are, were being made by government inconsistently and chaotically.

As an example of an incompetent approach, in the beginning of the pandemic Ministry of health of the Czech Republic came with the decision to develop our own vaccine for COVID-19 and it assigned three state managed departmental research facilities without needed analysis of feasibility to do this task. We warned about the problematic nature of this decision in the beginning of May.

The current situation clearly shows that the effort of research facilities should instead be directed to mapping of variability of biological properties of the new coronavirus, to learning about immunobiology and pathogenesis of the new coronavirus infection, to the development of a modern diagnosis of the coronavirus infection based on fast and reliable tests and to applying these findings for the epidemiology of the pandemic processes in our country. For such tasks the Czech government and Czech research has sufficient capacities in institutes of Czech Academy of Sciences, in universities and in some research institutes. However, already in spring and summer scientists proved that they were able to put their intellectual and instrumental capacities for the service of anti-pandemic activities.

In this situation we call for the government of the Czech Republic to base their further efforts for limiting the current coronavirus pandemic solely on opinions of competent experts from the areas of hygiene, epidemiology and infectious medicine.

We also strongly recommend to find inspiration in methods for our country in neighboring countries, which currently are more successful in combating the coronavirus pandemic, such as Slovakia, Poland, Germany or Austria. We further demand the current strategy of testing to be quickly re-evaluated so that diagnostic capacities are not unbearably overwhelmed, and also a fast introduction of purposeful and fast testing of symptomatic people. In order of the pandemic to get under control, we believe it to be essential there are clear, comprehensible, professionally supported and consistent instructions for the public. Therefore, we also expect that ministers and other high-ranking government officials will be presenting the same information in media, that they will not be contradictory and that this information will not be changed every single day.

The Council of the Learned Society of the Czech Republic in Prague 15th September 2020