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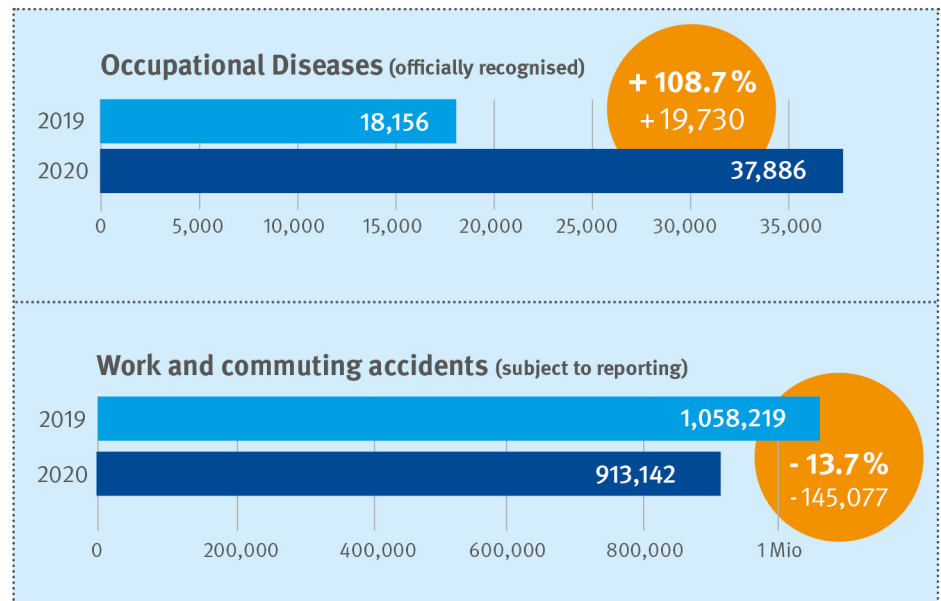
 web magazine
www.dguv.de/kompakt

Page 2: People must be protected from the virus when working – Interview with Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the DGUV

Corona crisis – fewer work accidents, more occupational diseases

The DGUV recently published the provisional accident and occupational disease figures for 2020. These clearly reflect two effects of the pandemic. On the one hand, remote learning and working from home have led to fewer accidents in workplaces, in educational facilities and commuting. On the other hand, workers in the care and health professions continued at their places of work to fight for the health and lives of sick people. These workers were exposed to a higher risk of infection due to their occupation. This has implications for occupational diseases.

In April 2020, 27% of all employed people worked from home, and around 6 million people were on Germany's short-time work scheme. As a result, there were fewer accidents at work and on the way to or from work. Overall, the number of accidents fell by 13.7% compared to 2019. This trend was also seen in the number of fatal accidents. 631 workers died in an accident at work or while commuting, 175 fewer than in the previous year. However, this particularly large drop in fatal accidents at work was not due to the pandemic, but rather adjustments to the 2019 statistics at the start of 2020. There were also fewer accidents among children



The number of officially recognised occupational diseases increased significantly during the pandemic. Work accidents, in contrast, decreased due to working from home and the short-time work scheme.

and young people in educational facilities and while travelling to or from these facilities due to the childcare, school or university being cancelled. Overall, there were 40.7% fewer accidents at educational facilities and travelling to these facilities. 29 accidents were fatal, 15 fewer than in 2019. In contrast, the number of suspected occupational illness reported and the number of confirmed cases increased significantly in 2020. According to the provisional figures, a total of around 106,000 suspected occupational diseases were reported, which is 32% more than in 2019. Of these, 54,000 cases were officially confirmed to be the result of the person's occupation. This is an increase of almost 53%. The number of officially recognised occupational diseases more than doubled to almost 38,000.

The rise in the number of occupational diseases is also due to the pandemic. 'We have a large number of suspected occupational diseases being reported in connection with Covid-19', said Dr Edlyn Höller, Deputy Director General of the DGUV. More than 30,000 suspected occupational diseases linked to COVID-19 were reported in 2020

according to a preliminary survey conducted by the German social accident insurance institutions. Of these, almost 23,000 cases were decided by the end of the year and more than 18,000 occupational diseases were officially recognised. 'In January and February 2021, another 26,000 cases were recognised', added Dr Höller.

The figures show that it continues to be important to protect workers from infection and from possible long-term consequences. In addition to masks, hygiene rules and distancing, a high vaccination rate can also help to increase protection from infection in the workplace and in educational facilities. 'Getting vaccinated not only protects yourself and your colleagues, but it also prevents hospitals from being overwhelmed and it reduces the spread of the virus', urged Dr Höller. As such, the BG Hospitals, the social accident insurance institutions and the DGUV have jointly launched a nationwide campaign under the motto #Impfenschützt (*vaccinating protects*).

➔ www.dguv.de > Webcode dp1318565 (German only)

➔ www.dguv.de/impfenschuetzt (German only)



Dear Reader,

We have been living with the pandemic for a year now. For me, this is a good reason to ask: what have we learned from the crisis so far?

I think it has certainly become clear to us that we are much more interconnected and dependent on one another than we might realise. A virus knows no borders, follows no human-made rules and does not differentiate between individuals. The consequences of the pandemic – both negative and positive – remain difficult to assess. Some industries fear for their very existence, others are experiencing growth. Digitalisation is booming, albeit not to the same extent across all areas.

As Germany's provider of statutory accident insurance, we have learned and achieved a lot in the pandemic year. We are protecting the health of our employees by offering options to work from home and good hygiene concepts. This means that we can fulfil our legal mandate to the usual full extent and with the familiar level of quality. We stand at the side of companies and educational institutions in times of crisis. This also includes putting Germany's OSH Standard into concrete terms with sector-specific recommendations. Not always an easy task.

We should also look ahead. Vaccination rates are on the rise and we will help raise awareness in this area as well. At the same time, we will deal with the effects of the pandemic, such as long COVID and COVID-19 as an occupational disease, as well as mental stress and musculoskeletal disorders caused by teleworking.

The pandemic is placing a lot of strain on all of us. Nevertheless, I believe that the experience gained will strengthen us for future challenges.

Dr Stefan Hussy
Director General
of the DGUV

“People need to be protected from the virus while they are working”

Just over a year ago, the SARS-CoV-2 virus first hit the world of work in Germany. 365 days in crisis mode with drastic cutbacks and restrictions in companies and educational facilities. In order to fulfil its prevention mandate, Germany's social accident insurance undertook a number of new activities under the conditions of the pandemic. A retrospective and outlook in conversation with Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance.

Dr Hussy, the past year was enormously demanding. What were the greatest challenges for Germany's social accident insurance?

These are indeed very unique times. A multitude of complex issues had to be tackled – often ad hoc and at different levels. The pandemic affects all people and all areas of life. Making workplaces healthy and safe is one of our core tasks. So, we took action very quickly after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Even before the SARS-CoV-2 OSH Standard was introduced, Germany's social accident insurance institutions had begun to prepare information for companies. In parallel, we helped the government to develop the standard. In terms of policymaking, there has been close cooperation and exchange, especially with the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), the social partners, the Committee for Occupational Safety and Health of the Federal States (LASI) and the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA). Following this, the resulting specifications had to be prepared for companies and educational institutions in such a way that they could be implemented quickly and practically.

In addition, we kicked off information campaigns, such as 'Workplace protection is health protection'. This motto was used to promote the AHA distancing and

hygiene rule as well as the #LüftenHilft (*ventilating helps*) campaign. And finally, this is about keeping operations running at our own sites and maintaining our employees' ability to work through hygiene plans, a phased plan, regular information and allowing as many people to work from home as possible – just as many companies and educational facilities have done. This has been particularly challenging for our research and educational institutions.

What support have companies needed?

A core responsibility of social accident insurance is prevention using all suitable means. For us, this means that people must be protected from the virus at their workplace when doing their job. The SARS-CoV-2 OSH Standard, which was passed by legislators for this purpose, laid the groundwork. It created a uniform national framework for occupational infection control.

But what does this actually mean for a call centre, a beauty salon, a supermarket, a print shop or a school? Together with our social accident insurance institutions, we translated the new standard into practical implementation terms for several hundred sectors in a very short time.

” Workplace protection is health protection – this has become very clear during the pandemic.

It was a mammoth task, but of vital importance. Workplace protection is health protection – this has become very clear during the pandemic. Because the BMAS specifications changed and were adapted differently by the various federal states, there were significantly more enquiries to the social accident insurance institutions.

What kind of consulting have the prevention services been offering?

Just like everyone else at the start of the



Photo: AdobeStock/ Adrey Popov

Partitions, reduced contact and medical masks help to protect workers in medical practices from the increased risk of infection.

pandemic, we knew very little about the virus, how it's transmitted and its effects. There was a lot of uncertainty all round. But one thing was clear: occupational safety and health does not simply stop during a pandemic. Some sectors are currently working at full steam, such as the construction sector. So, we had to find new ways to provide consulting and monitoring regarding implementation of the measures. We have been there for companies and educational institutions at all times – the need for information has been immense.

Have policymakers also called for occupational safety and health during the pandemic?

Yes, of course, and rightly so. The prevention mandate of the social accident insurance institutions is enshrined in law. We are required to use all suitable means to prevent workplace accidents, occupational diseases and work-related health hazards from happening in the first place. To do this, we carry out sector-specific consultations in companies and educational institutions, and take on the regulatory supervision of protective measures on site.

However, there are times when I would like to see much more political support for our activities, for example for our inspectors. Even during the pandemic, they have continued to visit companies to provide advice and monitor OSH as well as infection control measures. They are helping to ensure that many businesses and educa-

tional facilities can work as safely as possible, even under the current conditions. I would have liked to see this activity, like many others, classified as an essential service. In the past few months, various parties have repeatedly called for more inspections. However, this means that appropriate conditions for workers who are on the road should also be created, such as emergency childcare.

Is the SARS-CoV-2 OSH Standard working? How safe are workplaces?

It's not possible to make a final conclusion yet, but the recently published study 'Corona Risk in the Retail Sector' confirms that we are on the right track. This joint study conducted by the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Trade and Logistics Industry and the BAuA shows that there is no increased risk of infection by the SARS-CoV-2 virus for workers in the retail sector. Protective measures, such as partitions at checkouts and service counters, distancing rules, masks, increased ventilation and cleaning, very likely play a significant role. That's a somewhat positive sign.

But we're still in the middle of the pandemic, and future developments are still uncertain. We hope that more and more sectors will be able to resume operations. We are more than happy to advise businesses on how to do this safely.

➔ www.dguv.de/corona (German only)

➔ www.bghw.de › Webcode: 1612526312

KulturCheck web app

The world of work is changing and with it the requirements for a sustainable culture of prevention. When practised in a company, this increases the safety and health of all workers. The new KulturCheck web app created by the German Social Accident Insurance helps to optimise a company's prevention culture.

The first step in successful prevention work is a systematic assessment of the current situation in a company or educational institution. What is the state of safety and health there? Is there a constructive error-management culture? Is there a good working atmosphere? When answering these questions, it is important to involve all employees. This is how sustainable improvements can be achieved together.

The new KulturCheck web app helps safety officers, managers and other responsible persons to assess the prevention culture and identify where action is needed. It is based on analyses of the six fields of action of the **kommittensch** prevention campaign: leadership, communication, participation, error culture, working atmosphere, and safety and health.

These are approached from two perspectives. The Structure-Check looks at the structural conditions for each field of action. The Employee-Check uses an anonymous survey to gather feedback from employees. Both analyses are carried out, evaluated and presented digitally. If necessary, the Employee-Check can be separated according to organisational units or staff responsibility. This highlights where there is potential in the organisation to optimise and which measures can be taken to further improve the prevention culture. A checklist, a plan of action and suggestions for action are also available.

The free tool is aimed at companies and educational institutions with at least 50 employees. It was developed by the Institute for Work and Health of the DGUV (IAG).

➔ www.kulturcheck.dguv.de
(German only)

Healthy workplaces campaign

'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load' is the motto of the new campaign launched in Germany at the beginning of March by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). The aim is to prevent work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). These can occur in all jobs and across all sectors. The campaign provides information on the measures that can be taken to prevent MSDs. Data and facts on the effects of MSDs are provided to raise awareness.

Practical tools and guides are provided to support the implementation of prevention measures. The focus is on risk assessment. Target groups include older workers, small companies, children and young people. The campaign is being implemented with the support of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy (GDA), which is a joint initiative between the social accident insurance institutions and the federal and state governments to promote safety and health at work.

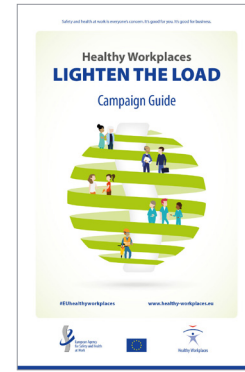


Photo: EU-OSHA

→ healthy-workplaces.eu/en

Number of the Month

Help with the effects of COVID-19



The long-term consequences of surviving COVID-19 are many and varied. People affected report respiratory problems, functional disorders of the nervous or cardiovascular system and psychological problems.

To assist healthcare workers, the BG Hospital Group and the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Health and Welfare Services (BGW) have developed a comprehensive diagnostic procedure, the Post-Covid Check. This covers all relevant specialist areas such as neurology, pneumology, cardiology and psychology as well as rehabilitation management.

They examine all symptoms and prepare a comprehensive and individual assessment, diagnosis and therapy. The Post-Covid Check is carried out at the BG hospitals in Berlin, Bochum, Duisburg, Halle, Hamburg and Murnau.

The BG Hospital Bad Reichenhall also offers inpatient rehabilitation following a case of work-related COVID-19.

→ www.bg-kliniken.de/universitaetsklinikum-bergmannsheil-bochum > Aktuelles (German only)

Nationwide campaign encourages COVID-19 vaccination

Under the motto #ImpfenSchützt (*vaccinating protects*), the BG hospitals, the social accident insurance institutions and the DGUV are jointly promoting awareness of COVID-19 vaccination. In its first phase, the campaign is targeting people in the nursing and healthcare professions, with other occupational groups to follow. The aim of the advertisements and social media posts is to raise awareness of the importance of universal vaccination and the contribution of each individual.

→ www.dguv.de/impfenschuetzt (German only)

Illustration: DGUV

Legal Information

Published by: Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung (DGUV), Dr Stefan Hussy (Director General). The DGUV is the umbrella association of the German Social Accident Insurance Institutions for the public sector and for trade and industry.

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Translation: Peter Love

Layout: Atelier Hauer & Dörfler GmbH, www.hauer-doerfler.de

Publisher: Quadriga Media Berlin GmbH, Werderscher Markt 13, 10117 Berlin

Printing: DCM Druckcenter Meckenheim

Sources: p. 2 – Jan Röhl/DGUV