Update of COVID-19 measures taken by the City of Vienna as of November 2020

Safety measures for the Vienna City Council and District Council elections on 11 October, 2020

Preparatory measures:
- Due to higher demand for absentee voting in this election, more staff was tasked with issuing absentee voting cards. Compared to the Austrian parliamentary election in 2019, 163 additional staff members of the Vienna City Administration are on duty in local electoral offices this year.
- Critical facilities like residential and nursing homes were not used as polling stations in this election. Only the residents of these facilities were allowed to cast their votes there.
- Polling stations smaller than 40 m² had been replaced by larger rooms.

The City of Vienna's department for elections and legal affairs (Municipal Department 62 – MA 62) cooperated with established experts on hygiene and microbiology and applied a mathematical simulation model to develop safety measures for the Vienna elections in October 2020.

Required safety measures on election day:
- Bring and wear your own face masks (covering mouth and nose), and keep a distance of at least one metre to others.
- Use your own pen, or a freshly disinfected pen.
- Disinfect the furniture and all parts of the polling stations that are touched by voters or staff (these parts must be disinfected every two hours during the elections) & keep the polling stations clean (additional cleaning staff was hired.)
- Polling stations must be aired properly.
- "Identification screens" – fully transparent hygiene screens allow election staff to safely establish every voter's identity (by seeing their entire face without a mask).
“Safe Elections” screening programme:
As part of a screening programme by the Vienna Health Board, the City of Vienna offered voluntary COVID-19 tests for all municipal staff taking an active part in the elections or in the counting of ballots, for scrutineers and replacement scrutineers (as well as for confidantes and election observers). Altogether, about 12,000 individuals were invited to participate in the screening programme. Every participant was provided with a test kit that involves gargling with a saline solution before and after the election. The screening programme was meant to protect both voters and municipal staff. Every candidate in the elections for the Vienna City Council and District Councils had access to a test kit containing four of the so-called “gargle tests”. All these tests were offered by the City of Vienna free of charge.

Voting in spite of a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection:
Confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients were visited by a mobile election commission wearing enhanced personal protection equipment including FFP2 masks without exhalation valves, as well as face visors, disposable scrubs and gloves. Moreover, mobile election commissions visiting COVID-19 patients were supported by paramedics.

Helping the economy and people to keep jobs

Three COVID-19 aid packages have been put together so far to support the labour market, businesses, the tourism sector, clubs, bars and restaurants, providing a total of more than EUR 400 million.

Key figures:
• EUR 13 million and 1,000 additional jobs under the project “Joboffensive 50+” for people in long-term unemployment.
• EUR 1.3 million for the “Lehrlingsverbund” pilot project: companies that cannot continue training their apprentices due to the crisis are given the chance to
place their apprentices in inter-company vocational training for four months. In this case, the city organises the placement of apprentices and pays their remuneration.

- EUR 22 million in support funds for tourism and hotels
- EUR 3 million for clubs in Vienna
- A stimulus package worth EUR 14 million for digital innovation, climate mitigation and business location development
- "Stolz auf Wien" ("Proud of Vienna"), a limited liability company, invests up to EUR 1 million in Viennese businesses that need short-term funding, acquiring up to a maximum of 20% of total partnership shares. These shares are sold again within seven years after acquisition. The target group for this are Vienna-based companies from all sectors that are a "strong part of the Viennese identity" and can demonstrate a corresponding relevance beyond Vienna, have a high economic importance for upstream and downstream sectors, industries and companies, and secure a relevant number of jobs. Vienna is making EUR 20 million available for this initiative. In addition, the Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Austrian banks are contributing a further EUR 20 million in capital.
- Keeping "Schanigärten" (outdoor seating areas operated by restaurants and cafés) opened according to the same conditions as in summer, based on an amendment of the relevant legislation.
- Increased funding for work foundations: more and more businesses in Vienna have to manage temporary excess human resources. The Vienna Employee Promotion Fund (waff) and the Vienna Labour Market Service (AMS) offer different kinds of support for businesses. Options range from establishing a work foundation if staff needs to be laid off, to staff qualification measures for employees based on short-time work models or temporary leave for further training.
- Bridging loans for small and medium-sized enterprises: As part of a support scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises in Vienna, additional guarantees of up to 80% are provided to credit institutions for bridging loans (working capital financing). Applications for a guarantee are submitted to the respective house bank.

On 7 October 2020, the City of Vienna launched an additional economic stimulus package of EUR 600 million earmarked for 300 projects, including EUR 239.5 million in federal funding for municipal tasks. The funding focus will be on education, transport, sports facilities, public transport and retirement homes (residential facilities for the elderly).
Public testing

On 16 August 2020 a COVID-19 testing site next to a sport stadium (Ernst-Happel-Stadion) in Vienna’s second district was opened, originally for people returning from a holiday in Croatia. 698 tests were conducted on the first day alone.

Due to high demand the positive experience with this first drive-in and walk-in testing site in Vienna, the City of Vienna medical crisis management unit decided on 21 August 2020 to not only continue offering free SARS-CoV-2 tests, but even to expand the target group to include returnees from the Balearic islands and from countries not listed as high-risk countries in the relevant Austrian federal ordinance, as well as people returning to Vienna from other parts of Austria.

On 24 September 2020, a second COVID-19 testing site was opened on Danube Island. It focuses on people who have developed symptoms. Six drive-in lanes for cars and three walk-in lanes allow for up to 1,000 tests to be conducted per day during the initial phase. The walk-in facilities are for people who cannot go there by car, and have no symptoms. Just like the first site near Ernst-Happel-Stadion, the second site uses the new “gargle tests” developed by a Viennese researcher.

New test methods

The new test method was developed under the leadership of the Viennese researcher and head of the Institute for Laboratory Diagnostics at the Favoriten Clinic, Dr Manuela Födinger, and her team in order to facilitate COVID testing especially in children, and allow for large-scale testing. Gargling with a solution based on common salt replaces the need to take samples with cotton swabs from the throat and nose of test subjects. The advantages of the gargling method are scalability and that it can be used on a large scale and the sample collection is more comfortable for the test subjects. In addition, the method is suitable for adults and children from 6 years of age and - unlike the swab tests - can also be performed by non-medical personnel.
Also the Viennese Clinic Donaustadt succeeded in a further important step in the diagnosis of COVID-19. Under the leadership of the bio computer scientist Armin Robubi a now recently scientifically confirmed rapid test could be developed at the Donaustadt Clinic, which delivers the COVID test result within 30 minutes. The new rapid test procedure is being used at selected Viennese schools. The “Cluster Busters” - the name of the mobile teams of doctors and assisting nurses - come directly to the schools by bus and search for sources of infection.

COVID gargle test by bike messenger
Since September 22, 2020, bicycle couriers commissioned by the City of Vienna have been bringing gargle tests to people who are suspected of having Corona at home. The persons can perform the test themselves. The sample is then taken by the bicycle courier to the laboratory. This new test logistics means that more tests can be taken at the same time, thus reducing overall waiting times. There are currently around 280 “COVID test bikers” in Vienna.

COVID-19 Checkboxes
Is it Covid-19 or "only" a flu-like illness? Those who want to exclude the former and be treated for the symptoms of the flu can visit one of the first two mobile container ordinations in Vienna starting from 12 November. In the "checkboxes", patients with cold, rhinitis and flu symptoms will receive safe, medical treatment. All patients will be tested with rapid antigen tests before treatment. If they are negative, they can be treated by a doctor directly in the container ordination. If the test is positive, necessary measures and contact tracing are initiated immediately. In the medium term, 30 checkboxes are planned throughout Vienna. Appointments are made three days in advance. This appointment allocation is intended to avoid waiting times for patients.

❖ Further (selected) measures:

❖ Containment Concept for City of Vienna departments and services
The basic requirements and legal framework for departments and services of the Vienna City Administration relating to COVID-19 were summarised in the COVID-19-BASIC prevention concept for the City of Vienna. In addition to hygiene measures, organisational provisions and measures related to workplace and
labour regulations, the concept also sets forth key terms and measures for active virus containment: What exactly is a suspected COVID-19 case? What must be done if a team member is suspected of having contracted the virus?

- **Vienna repairs voucher**

  The “Vienna repair voucher” is a funding program of the City of Vienna to make the repair of still functional objects financially more attractive than the purchase of new ones. The repair voucher can be redeemed for repair services in companies of the repair network that are partners of the subsidy program. Funding is provided for 50 percent of the gross invoice amount up to a maximum of 100 euros. The subsidy amount is deducted immediately from the invoice. There is no need to submit tedious applications for payment. This measure is intended to support Viennese companies that are affected by the COVID-19 crisis.