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Press release

Singer Tim Bendzko supports the corona experiment of University Medicine Halle by holding a simulated concert

The future of the cultural and sporting event industry and the continued existence of professional sports, which are rich in tradition but less blessed with TV revenues, is bleak. A return to large-scale concerts and handball games in an arena seems nearly impossible due to the risk of becoming infected with the corona virus. This can mean lights out for creative artists and professional teams like the handball players of SC DHfK from Leipzig. The research project RESTART-19 is conducting an evidence-based and scientifically designed study to investigate the risks of holding a major event at an indoor venue. The aim is to find a way to restart such events. The project is receiving around €990,000 in funding from the states of Saxony-Anhalt and Saxony, as well as from University Medicine Halle (Saale).

RESTART-19 is made up of several sub-projects that include developing a mathematical model used in risk assessment and defining framework conditions for major events. The most visible part, however, is the large experiment which will be conducted on August 22, 2020 in Leipzig Arena. "On that day we will run three simulations. One will simulate the way an event used to be held before the corona pandemic - of course with the greatest possible care taken to protect all participants. In the second simulation, comprising 4,000 participants, visitor flows will be directed in a specific manner. The third will be a simulation with 2,000 participants," explains Dr. Stefan Moritz, project manager from University Medicine Halle (Saale). To make sure things stay upbeat, singer Tim Bendzko – along with the DHfK handball players from Leipzig – will support the experiment by holding a simulated concert. "Do your part by lending your support and signing up for the study. See you on August 22nd at the Quarterback Immobilien Arena in Leipzig. Stay healthy!" says Bendzko.

An extensive hygiene concept in place for all three scenarios includes surface disinfection and FFP2 masks, says Moritz. In addition, all participants will be tested for SARS-CoV-2. When checking in at the entrance, every participant will receive an envelope containing their seat number and a certain number of tickets. Those who receive three tickets will take part in all three simulations, those with two tickets will only participate in the first two. "Every participant will also receive a contact tracing device that is linked to everyone else's. This will measure and record contact intensity with respect to distance, duration and frequency. We have installed 30 so-called anchors throughout the venue, which can measure the position of all 4,000 study participants simultaneously using ultra-broadband technology," says Moritz.

Saxony-Anhalt's Minister of Economics and Science, Professor Armin Willingmann, points out: "The corona pandemic is paralyzing the event industry.

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As long as there is a risk of infection, major concerts, trade fairs and sporting events cannot take place. This is why it is so important to find out which technical and organizational conditions can effectively minimize the risk of infection. Through RESTART-19, University Medicine Halle is doing real groundbreaking work to restart the event industry in Central Germany and beyond. I am pleased that Saxony-Anhalt and Saxony are pulling together to do this.”

The experiment will not only take place in the arena; the participants’ journey to the arena is also part of the study. “For big events especially, people come in from surrounding regions and use public transport to get around the city. That’s why we are also including the journey to the arena by tram from a park-and-ride at the Neue Messe and the Monument to the Battle of the Nations. We also want to trace the number of contacts here. Participants check in at the park-and-ride and anchors are also installed in the tram,” says Moritz. This is because the people that a person comes into contact with in the tram will not necessarily be in the same part of the arena and therefore there is a risk of infection even before the actual event starts. “Thus, we hope to also discover the risk of infection posed by public transport,” explains Moritz.

The experiment is looking for 4,000 young and healthy participants. Further information about the project, the procedure and the risks of the experiment can be found on the website: www.restart19.de

“If we want to allow major events to take place again in the future, we need scientific findings on how to minimize the risk of infection and create a safer environment for all participants. I am very pleased that we are able to support such an important cross-state project that will pave the way back to more normality. We need major events to take place again in the future, but as a government we are also responsible for protecting our citizens. In the run-up to the study, I am satisfied that the protective measures that will be in place will ensure that none of the study participants or the population will be exposed to any dangers,” explains Petra Köpping, State Minister for Social Affairs and Social Cohesion of the Free State of Saxony.

The cross-state project “RESTART-19” of University Medicine Halle (Saale) is supported by the Ministry of Economics, Science and Digitization of the State of Saxony-Anhalt, and the State Ministry of Science, Culture and Tourism and the State Ministry for Social Affairs and Social Cohesion of the Free State of Saxony. Project partners are SC DHfK Leipzig Handball and ZSL Betreibergesellschaft mbH.