



Medizinische Fakultät
der Martin-Luther-Universität
Halle-Wittenberg



Universitätsklinikum
Halle (Saale)

Press release

RESTART-19 experiment successfully staged

“We are really pleased. Data collection is going very well so that we will have good quality data, the atmosphere is great and we are extremely satisfied with the amount of discipline people are showing with respect to wearing masks and using disinfectant,” says Dr. Stefan Moritz, who is heading the RESTART 19 study at University Medicine Halle (Saale). The most visible part of the experiment - a simulated concert – took place on August 22, 2020. Three scenarios were simulated throughout the day. The German singer and songwriter Tim Bendzko provided a real concert atmosphere.

The experiment was successfully staged in both a figurative and literal sense. RESTART-19 is a scientific, evidence-based study that is investigating the risks of major arena events. It is being conducted by University Medicine Halle in conjunction with ZSL, the management company of the Quarterback Immobilien Arena Leipzig, the handball Bundesliga club SC DHfK Leipzig, and other partners. Its aim is to find ways to restart such events.

RESTART-19 is made up of several sub-projects that include the development of a mathematical model for risk assessment and the establishment of framework conditions for a major event. The collected data will now go on to be analyzed. Initial results will be available in the autumn and will probably be released in the first weeks of October.

1,500 trackers continuously transmitted data in the Quarterback Immobilien Arena Leipzig. Each participant received a tracker which they hung around their neck. “Even though only about one-third of the expected number of test subjects took part, we will be able to work very well with such a data pool,” says the head of the Department of Clinical Infectiology at University Hospital Halle (Saale).

“It was really enjoyable. At first, I thought the masks would make for a very sterile atmosphere, but there was a surprisingly good vibe. And I was amazed that the audience in Leipzig knew so many of the lyrics,” says Bendzko. Even though it was part of a study, the concert was a step towards normality. “I hope that the results will enable us to play concerts in front of real audiences again soon,” says the singer, who also pointed out that 99.9 percent of people in the event industry work in behind the scenes. “We are heading for a major disaster and we urgently need to find solutions.”

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For months now, sports clubs, especially those involved in indoor sports, have also had to manage without an audience and thus without an income.

“We appreciate that 1,500 people showed up - initially in the pouring rain. They waited to get into the arena, then spent ten hours with us during the day despite having to exit and re-enter three times at the height of summer for the different scenarios. They are true heroes. And it was a happy day for us. The last time we experienced something like this was 167 days ago at our last home game,” says Karsten Günther, Managing Director of SC DHfK Handball. The people and sponsors were what generated our income. “We don't play to the seats, nor to the arena walls, but to an audience,” he says, pointing out the importance of having spectators at handball matches as well as at concerts.

Owners of large venues like the Quarterback Immobilien Arena Leipzig are taking a double beating because neither sporting events nor cultural events with an audience can take place.

“We are curious to see what the results of the study will be, but we are also aware that it is not a panacea,” says Matthias Kölmel, Managing Director of the company that manages the Quarterback Immobilien Arena Leipzig. The event industry is the sixth largest industry in Germany and it is relevant both socially and economically. But every day it is crumbling bit by bit. “Events create opportunities to encounter others. People are able to escape from their day-to-day lives,” he says. On March 10, 2020 we were one of the first arenas to close and will probably be one of the last to be allowed to reopen.

The project is being financed by around 990,000 euros from the states of Saxony-Anhalt and Saxony as well as from University Medicine Halle (Saale). The RESTART-19 project has involved the development of a study design, a hygiene concept, funding applications and approvals, the recruitment of test subjects, experiment planning, the distribution of test kits, and the analysis of the tests.

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