

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

EXHIBITION TEXTS 2023



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At the beginning of 2020, the world was hit by a pandemic that spread across the countries of the world. From the first reports of a new form of coronavirus to today, we have experienced a transformative time. It is the most extensive pandemic in over a hundred years.

Many of us have been sick and some have lost loved ones. Some have cared for the sick. Some have lost their jobs while others worked to keep society functioning. Some have continued to work at their workplaces while others have worked from home. Many have felt anxiety, fear and loneliness. Some have isolated themselves. Some of us have lived almost as usual.

ISOLATION

Elderly people and people in risk groups were asked to isolate themselves. For a long period, conversations were held over balcony railings, celebrations had to take place via the internet or in the form of stairwell coffee. There were curfew at hospitals and nursing homes.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

At times, everyone was asked to reduce their physical contacts with others, to maintain social distancing. Even younger, healthy people chose to completely cut off their social contacts for fear of becoming infected or spreading the infection further.

OUR ELDERLY

Our elderly are the ones with the greatest risk of becoming seriously ill from covid-19. The infection spread to nursing homes and to those who had home care. There were many elderly people who died when the spread of infection was at its peak and before we had a vaccine.

UNCERTAINTY

Not knowing what to expect, how wide spread and serious it will be and how long it will last. Anxiety can settle both in the soul and in the body. In times of uncertainty, it's hard to feel hope and worry can take over.

INFODEMIC

Misinformation, often based on various conspiracy theories, has spread widely during the pandemic. Infodemic is a concept that became relevant again in connection with the outbreak of covid-19. The word infodemic is a combination of the words information and epidemic. When as much information is produced as during the pandemic, the sheer volume of facts, rumors and fears being spread makes it difficult to know what is true and what is not. The flow of information spreads like a virus. Reflection and fact checking are important means against becoming a "spreader" yourself.

JOB LOSSES AND LAYOFFS

Workplaces had to adapt. Large industries had to shut down production due to a lack of supplies and raw materials. Many businesses were affected by infection control measures such as distance requirements and regulation of the maximum number of people.

THE SWEDISH STRATEGY

The goal of the Swedish strategy for handling the pandemic was to protect the country's elderly and others at high risk of becoming seriously ill. The spread of infection should also be slowed down as much as possible so that the healthcare system would not be overburdened.

We were advised to keep our distance and urged to wash our hands and avoid unnecessary travel. If we could, we should work from home. Restrictions were introduced in the form of limited numbers at gatherings, bans on visiting nursing homes and home schooling for high school students. Face masks were recommended during peak periods in public transport and in places where it was difficult to keep a distance. The strategy received international attention as it differed from the measures taken elsewhere. In many countries, lockdowns were enforced, with periods of school closure, bans on leaving the home, and shops kept closed. There were also legal requirements to use a face mask outside the home. There was an extensive debate both inside and outside of Sweden about what should and should not be done.

In the summer of 2020, Sweden's parliament appointed a commission that was tasked with evaluating the government's and authorities' measures to limit the spread of covid-19 and the effects of the spread. The Corona Commission's main criticism in the final report was that they failed to protect the country's elderly to a sufficient extent, that preparedness was not good and that stricter measures such as quarantine and entry bans should have been introduced at the beginning of the pandemic.



No' 1 tram in Gothenburg on April 2, 2020.

Those who could would stay at home. But the tram driver was at work, as well as all those who had jobs which had to be done on site. Many of these jobs are also those that ensure essential services for society.

Photographer: Annica Engström 2020

PANDEMICS IN OUR TIME

The disease covid-19 is caused by a coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. There are a large number of corona viruses, most of them found in different animal species. A few are transmitted from animals to humans and some are transmitted from humans to humans. Some types of corona virus cause our common colds. However, two of them, have in recent decades, caused severe symptoms with high mortality: SARS, which caused an epidemic in 2003 and 2004, and MERS, which was discovered in 2012. SARS had low infectivity and could be stopped with extensive infection control measures. The spread of MERS is still ongoing, but the virus has limited transmissibility between humans.

Influenza viruses caused three major pandemics in the 20th century: Spanish flu in 1918, the Asian flu in 1957 and the Hong Kong influenza 1968. The virus that caused the Hong Kong influenza is still spread as one of the seasonal influenzas, and results in an excess mortality of around a thousand older people every year in Sweden. Vaccines are offered annually against seasonal flu to prevent serious illness.

The pandemic known as the Spanish flu broke out in 1918 and lasted for just over two years and claimed 50 million lives, around 35,000 of these were Swedes. The flu almost only affected young people. No other infectious disease has caused so many deaths in such a short time.

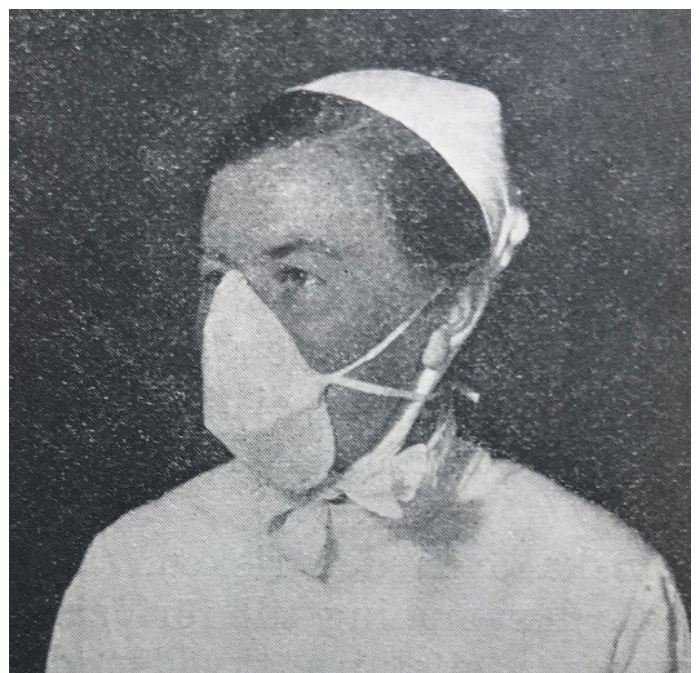
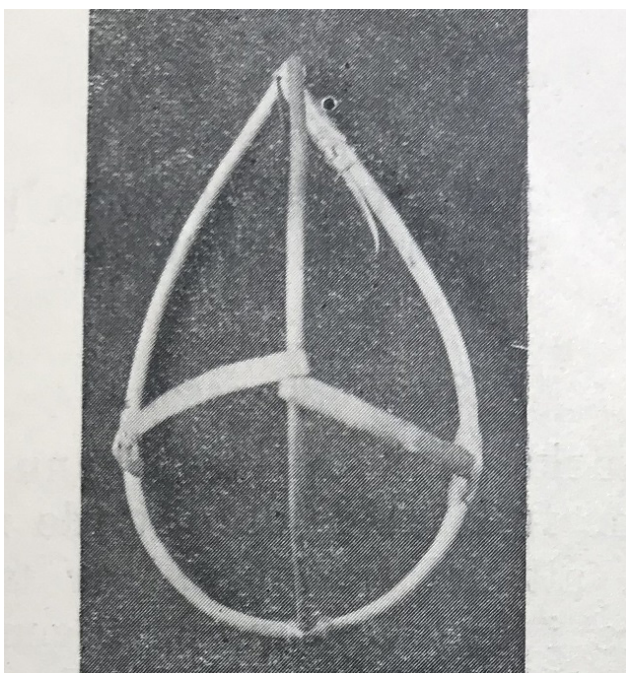
FACE MASK

"In these days when so many people in their prime are being snatched away, when healthcare staff are exposed to more dangers than usual in their work and inadequate due to the number of cases, it seems to me that everything should be tried that can be assumed to reduce the risk of infection."

Sven Johansson in the article

"To the question of individual prophylaxis for the Spanish flu", the Swedish Medical Journal, 1918.

When the Spanish flu breaks out, Sven Johansson, who is then chief physician at Gothenburg Children's Hospital, has protective masks made for the staff in his department. The mask consisted of basket willow covered with gauze. The frame was made in the basket-making facility at the home for the disabled, which was located on the other side of the road from the Sahlgrenska hospital. The manufacturing cost was 25 öre per piece and the mask could be reused after sterilization.

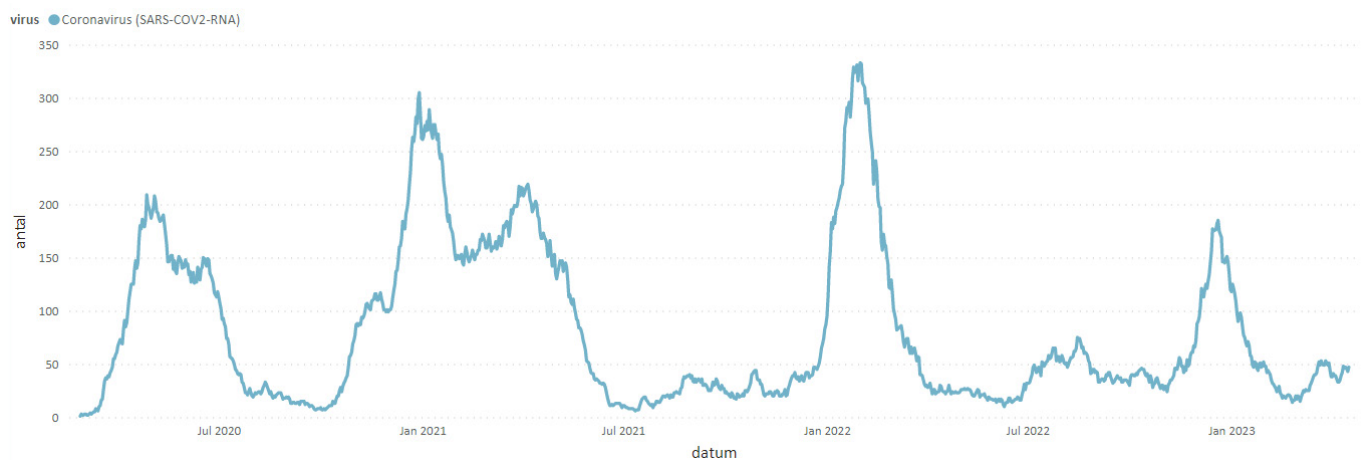


THE FIRST YEAR

The first year with covid-19 meant an adjustment for all of us. The professional title of epidemiologist and institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Public Health Agency, The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), the National Board of Health and Welfare quickly became part of our everyday lives.

Hospitals prepared for large influxes of sick people. The timeline shows a number of events during the first year of the pandemic. New variants of the virus developed, and we were to face new waves of high infection rates. At the same time, there is hope in the possibility of preventing severe illness and death with the help of the vaccines that have been developed at record speed.

At the height of the pandemic the authorities held daily press conferences. Though less frequent, press conferences continued to be held regularly for two years. From 1 April 2022, covid-19 is no longer classified as a disease that is dangerous to the public and society.



The graph shows the number of infectious individuals with covid-19 who were admitted for care at Sahlgrenska University Hospital on the day in question. From the first confirmed inpatient case on February 27, 2020 until April 2023. Peaks in the graph show how the number of patients increases after periods of high transmission.



Rosa Johansson, 99, in Gothenburg was one of the first in Västra Götaland to receive a vaccine against covid-19. The picture was taken at the Högsbotorp care home on December 27, 2020 by staff at the home.

TIMELINE COVID-19-PANDEMICS FIRST YEAR 2020

Events marked with * refer to activities at Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Gothenburg.

31 December 2019 - WHO draws attention to an outbreak of a number of cases of pneumonia in the city of Wuhan, in China. The virus that caused the pneumonia is unknown.

13 January 2020 - WHO report the first cases outside of China.

20 January - The first samples in Sweden are tested for the new corona virus.

21 January – Three cases are reported in France, the first in Europe.

30 January - The spread is increasing significantly and the WHO classifies the outbreak as an international threat to human health.

31 January – The first case is confirmed in Sweden.

*31 January - First meeting of Sahlgrenska University Hospital's outbreak group.

1 February - The coronavirus is classified in Sweden as a disease that is dangerous to the public and society.

*2 February - The first analysis of a PCR test is run at Sahlgrenska University Hospital.

11 February - The disease caused by the new coronavirus is named covid-19.

In mid-February, measurement of the levels of SARS-CoV-2 in Gothenburg's wastewater begins.

26 February - The second case of covid-19 is confirmed in Sweden, which is also the first case in the Västra Götaland region.

9 March - The Swedish Public Health Agency, the Agency for Community Protection and Preparedness (MSB) and the National Board of Health and Welfare start daily press conferences.

10 March - The Public Health Agency sees signs that covid-19 has started to spread in the Stockholm Region and the Västra Götaland region and therefore raises the risk level to the highest: very high risk of social spread in Sweden.

11 March - The WHO announces that covid-19 is now a pandemic. The disease is now found in 114 countries. The number of confirmed cases of covid-19 is more than 120,000. About 4,000 deaths have been reported.

11 March – The first death in Sweden due to covid-19 is reported.

12 March - The government bans public gatherings with more than 500 people.

*12 March - Triage tents are set up outside the emergency departments at Östra hospital, Sahlgrenska hospital, Mölndal hospital, Drottning Silvia's children's hospital, the psychiatric emergency room and the maternity ward.

16 March- The Public Health Agency recommends that people aged 70 and older should limit their contact with other people as far as possible. Those who can are recommended to work from home.

17 March - The Public Health Authority recommends that teaching in upper secondary school should not be conducted on the school's premises.

*17 March - Sahlgrenska University Hospital goes into heightened preparedness.

*18 March - The hospital's entrances are closed and access to visit patients is limited.

*20 March - Östra hospital is designated an epidemic hospital.

*21 March - A decision is made in the pandemic group to set up a field hospital outside Östra hospital.

*23 March - The hospital seeks people with a healthcare background to help in care of covid patients.

23 March – People over 70 years old are recommended to stay at home.

*25 March - First successful tests of antibody tests for the new coronavirus at Sahlgrenska University Hospital.

27 March - The Public Health Authority proposes that the number of participants allowed at public gatherings and public events is reduced from 500 to 50.

1 April - The government's decision to ban visitors to all the country's nursing homes comes into effect.

*8 April - Intensive care places for patients with covid-19 are also opened at Mölndal hospital. The first patient is registered in the field hospital IVA Kronan.

*23 April - Mölndal's hospital is also designated an epidemic hospital. In addition to intensive care, inpatient wards are being opened.

*4 June - Sahlgrenska University Hospital begins antibody testing for employees.

4 June – Health centres in the Västra Götaland region start to test for covid-19.

24 August - The first case in the world where a patient has been infected with covid-19 twice is reported.

*24 September - First patient with covid-19 to receive a lung transplant in Sweden, at Sahlgrenska University Hospital.

*16 October - First Swedish case of a patient who tested positive twice for covid-19. Confirmed by researchers at Sahlgrenska University Hospital and the University of Gothenburg.

*22 October - A new study at Sahlgrenska University Hospital and Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, shows that most people who have had covid-19 with symptoms develop antibodies.

29 October - Tightened recommendations are introduced in the Västra Götaland region.

3 November - The number of seated guests at restaurants and similar is limited to eight people per table.

*17 November - The Västra Götaland region receives help from Germany to increase sampling capacity.

3 December - The Public Health Authority recommends that upper secondary schools partially switch to distance learning.

*4 December - The ban on visitors and locked entrances at Sahlgrenska hospital is extended.

13 December – All regions in Sweden increase their intensive care capacity.

*14 December - The second wave is a fact. Hospital director Ann-Marie Wennberg comments on the situation internally: "The situation is extremely serious".

15-16 December - Sweden's first scientific meeting on covid-19 is arranged, State of the Art covid-19.

21 December - Pfizer/Biontechs becomes the first vaccine against covid-19 to be approved by the European Medicines Agency EMA.

26 December - First case of the mutated British virus variant discovered in Sweden.

27 December - The first people in Sweden are vaccinated against covid-19.

*2 January 2021- Twenty new intensive care beds open during the Christmas and New Year holidays at Sahlgrenska hospital.

11 February - Random samples show that infection with the British mutation is increasing in Västra Götaland.

*14 January - The first employees at Sahlgrenska University Hospital are vaccinated against covid-19.

17 February – New local recommendations in Västra Götaland.



Photo: Regionservice



Photographer: Johanna Ewald St Michaels

A NEW VIRUS

A new virus and managing a worldwide pandemic create a need for constant learning. Those who work in healthcare have had to develop and learn new practices alongside proven methods and treatments, often under a heavy workload and in full protective gear. Scores of research projects have been started and are still ongoing. Vaccines and medicines have been developed in a shorter time than ever before. Research and new knowledge will also create benefits on other areas.

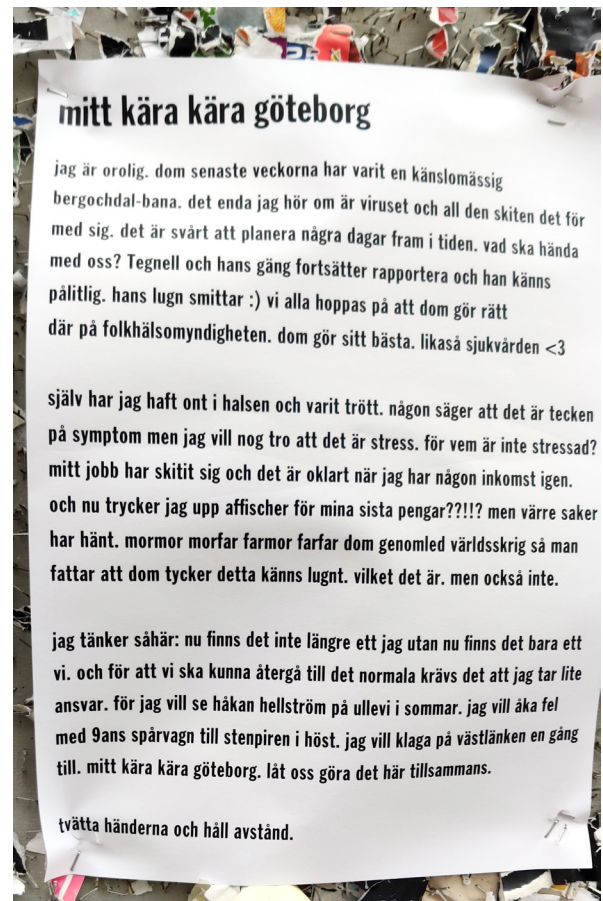
BEING SICK

Everyone knew the disease was coming. Many sat at home and tried to work out if they had symptoms and tried to prepare for what was to come. News reports came from fully staffed intensive care units or in interviews with those who had a milder case. Some distinctive symptoms were a deep cough with difficulty breathing, fever and headache. For some, the sense of smell and taste was impaired.

The virus hit people differently. The number of dead was continuously reported at the authorities' joint press conferences. In 2020, covid-19 was the third most common cause of death with 9,441 deaths. Nine out of ten victims were over 70 years old. Mortality was disproportionately high in those born outside of Sweden. More men than women became seriously ill. Even younger people became so ill that they needed intensive care. Some had long-term symptoms that persist, and others need a long time to recover. The word convalescence, from the Latin *convalesco* meaning to recover, has once again become relevant. The spread of covid-19 is continuously monitored and there are continuing recommendations for vaccination.



When the body's most important functions such as breathing, circulation and consciousness fail, intensive care is required. A specialist trained team of healthcare professionals provides advanced treatment and care with close monitoring. Photographer: Johanna Ewald St Michaels



Järntorget, Gothenburg April 1 2020. Photographer: Annica Engström

VI SOM GJORDE UTSTÄLLNINGEN COVID-19- PANDEMIN 2023

Idea	- Lisa Sputnes Mouwitz
Producer	- Annika Engström
Script	- Lisa Sputnes Mouwitz
Conservator	- Anna Stow
Exhibition and graphic design	- Annika Engström
English translation	- Anna Stow
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Medicinhistoriska museet
Östra Hamngatan 11,
411 10 Göteborg

tel. +46 (0) 10-441 43 00
e-post. medicinhistoriska@vgregion.se
www.medicinhistoriska.se