# National Fiche – Switzerland

## COVID-19 cases

On 7 September 2020, Switzerland registered a total of 1,733 COVID-19[[1]](#footnote-1) related deaths out of a population of 8.6 million people[[2]](#footnote-2). Data on deaths and cases of COVID-19 were not disaggregated by disability status and no official data about deaths and cases in care homes have been communicated. This absence of data regarding care homes is due to the structures in Switzerland which are either privately owned or under the responsibility of Cantons (administrative district). The authorities only stated that the majority of persons who died from COVID-19 had pre-existing health problems, without giving further details[[3]](#footnote-3).

## Emergency, lockdown, and confinement

Switzerland declared a state of emergency from 16 March to 27 April 2020[[4]](#footnote-4) but

unlike many other European countries, Switzerland was not on a strict lockdown. The country rather imposed restrictions on public life with the closure of non-essential shops, the prohibition of gathering of more than ~~5~~ five people and the closure of borders. The country also deployed up to 8,000 soldiers to support the health care system[[5]](#footnote-5). At local level, Cantons were allowed to implement stricter measures.

Disability rights were not suspended during the state of emergency, however AGILE.CH (Swiss umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities) denounced some “pressure from some political circles to get the economy moving again, while at the same time, advocating that people at risk be systematically isolated”[[6]](#footnote-6).

Regarding exception for persons with disabilities, they were exempted from the obligation to wear masks in public transports as of 13 July 2020[[7]](#footnote-7).

## Involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities

The Swiss Federal government invited AGILE.CH to take part in a consultation for the Federal Act to provide a legal basis to the Federal Order on measures to tackle the coronavirus adopted on 16 March 2020. AGILE.CH commented on the proposal and made a number of recommendations including:

* The implementation of disability-related exceptions adapted to different types of disability,
* Further attention given to psychological and social impact of the pandemic and public health control measures
* The improvement in the accessibility of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) information and recommendations[[8]](#footnote-8).

AGILE.CH also remained active in terms of advocacy to make sure that measures taken by the Government are inclusive. AGILE.CH highlighted the discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities from the Swiss Federal Railways that informed on 7 April 2020 that some assistance in stations can be refused[[9]](#footnote-9). The organisation also recalled that measures to tackle COVID-19 should not exclude nor undermine the right to self-determination of persons with disabilities.

In addition, AGILE.CH raised that the restrictions implemented created changes and uncertainty for persons with disabilities. Isolation created anxiety for persons with mental health conditions and added difficulties in daily life[[10]](#footnote-10).

## Communications and announcement

At the beginning of the pandemic, information was not available in accessible formats[[11]](#footnote-11). It was only a few weeks later that press conferences of the Swiss Government were translated into sign language but this was not case for communications of all Cantons[[12]](#footnote-12). The Federal Office of Public Health provided information about COVID-19 in Easy-to-read and sign language on its website[[13]](#footnote-13).

## Institutions and closed settings

Visits in older persons’ homes and nursing homes were maintained even though persons over 65 were considered as people at high risk. However, institutions were allowed to implement special precautions or social distancing rules[[14]](#footnote-14).

In cases where the resident of a nursing home developed the virus, the decision of its admission to the hospital was taken by the family doctor in consultation with relatives and in compliance with guidelines of the federal government and the desire of the person. However, in one interview, the manager of a retirement home clearly stated that “their residents suffering from the coronavirus can hardly be admitted to the hospital[[15]](#footnote-15).”

Regarding persons with pyschosocial disability living in institutions, their family had the choice between leaving their relatives in institutions or taking them back home[[16]](#footnote-16).

## Health care

The Swiss Academy for Medical Sciences developed guidance for intensive care units (ICU)[[17]](#footnote-17) in cases of lack of available beds[[18]](#footnote-18). The guidance included that “available resources are to be allocated without discrimination – i.e. without unjustified unequal treatment on grounds of age, sex, residence, nationality, religious affiliation, social or insurance status, or chronic disability. The allocation procedure must be fair, objectively justified and transparent.” However, among the exclusion criteria not to admit patients to the ICU, are included: an age limit of 85 to access ICU, chronic condition and moderate to severe dementia. The single fact that a patient is more than 85 can be a reason for not being admitted to ICU.

## Social Protection

It seems that disability-related social protection had not changed during the pandemic.

Parents who had to interrupt their activity to take care of their children under 12 years old due to the closure of schools, were entitled to a COVID-19 loss of income allowance.

On 16 April 2020, the Federal Council extended the age limit to 20 years old for parents of children with disabilities.

To receive the allowance, the parents must be taking care of a child whose specialised school or rehabilitation centre closed due to measures to tackle the pandemic, or receiving a benefit for intensive care from the Assurance Invalidité (Invalidity Insurance which is a mandatory social insurance)[[19]](#footnote-19).

1. Federal Office of Public Health’s website, available at: <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/situation-schweiz-und-international.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Federal Statistical Office, 27 August 2020, available at: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population/effectif-change.gnpdetail.2020-0182.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Information from EDF member, AGILE.CH, 7 September 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ordonnance Fédérale sur les mesures destinées à lutter contre le coronavirus (COVID-19), 16 March 2020, available at : [https://www.admin.ch/opc/search/?lang=fr&language[]=fr&product[]=fg&product[]=oc&product[]=cc&product[]=ba&product[]=jcd&date\_range\_min=&date\_range\_max=&d\_compilation=both&d\_is\_in\_force=yes&text=covid&lang=fr](https://www.admin.ch/opc/search/?lang=fr&language%5b%5d=fr&product%5b%5d=fg&product%5b%5d=oc&product%5b%5d=cc&product%5b%5d=ba&product%5b%5d=jcd&date_range_min=&date_range_max=&d_compilation=both&d_is_in_force=yes&text=covid&lang=fr) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS – Swiss National TV channel), La Suisse en état de situation extraordinaire jusqu’au 19 Avril, 16 March 2020. Available in French at: <https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/11166687-la-suisse-en-etat-de-situation-extraordinaire-jusquau-19-avril.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. AGILE.CH, Press release, Les personnes en situation de handicap ont des droits, même en situation de crise, 9 April 2020. The quote has been translated from French to English (unofficial translation). Statement available in French at: <https://f2bd7165-d0ed-406a-bac0-4fa0c0d60fa3.filesusr.com/ugd/3b62ac_19d08438df1f4c228e0df7cccdc7ad39.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Inclusion-Handicap, Port du masque obligatoire : pas de stigmatisation des personnes handicapées, Press release, 3 July 2020. Available at in French at : <https://www.inclusion-handicap.ch/fr/medias/communiques-de-presse_2/2021/port-du-masque-obligatoire-pas-de-stigmatisation-des-personnes-handicapees-523.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. AGILE.CH, Covid-19-Gesetz: Stellungnahme , 10 July 2020. Available in German at: <https://f2bd7165-d0ed-406a-bac0-4fa0c0d60fa3.filesusr.com/ugd/3b62ac_664efafe968246399831757c1fa0b77f.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. AGILE.CH, Statement, Les droits des personnes en situation de handicap doivent être respectés même en situation de crise. Available in French at: <https://3b62ac0e-0297-4a41-a9db-7f9e2910c308.usrfiles.com/ugd/3b62ac_09a9ea2b155946a093ed959eb2af6083.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Information from AGILE.CH, 7 September 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. AGILE.CH, Covid-19-Gesetz: Stellungnahme, 10 July 2020, available in German at: <https://f2bd7165-d0ed-406a-bac0-4fa0c0d60fa3.filesusr.com/ugd/3b62ac_664efafe968246399831757c1fa0b77f.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Federal Office of Public Health’s website available at: <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/barrierefreie-inhalte.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Federal Office of Pubic Health’s website available at: <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/besonders-gefaehrdete-menschen.html#-2101667053> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. SRF – Swiss Radio, “Our corona patients will hardly go to hospital”, 24 March 2020. Available in German at: <https://www.srf.ch/news/regional/ostschweiz/ethische-fragen-im-altersheim-unsere-coronapatienten-werden-kaum-ins-spital-gehen-koennen> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Le Nouvelliste, Coronavirus : Les institutions pour personnes handicapées mentales ayant fermé leurs ateliers, les parents ont repris leurs enfants à la maison. Available in French at : <https://www.lenouvelliste.ch/dossiers/coronavirus/articles/coronavirus-les-institutions-pour-personnes-handicapees-mentales-ayant-ferme-leurs-ateliers-les-parents-ont-repris-leurs-enfants-a-la-maison-923909> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences, COVID-19 pandemic: triage for intensive care treatment under resource scarcity, 24 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.assm.ch/en/Ethics/Topics-A-to-Z/Intensive-care-medicine.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Suárez-González A, Livingston G, Low LF, Cahill S, Hennelly N, Dawson WD, Weidner W, Bocchetta M, Ferri CP, Matias-Guiu JA, Alladi S, Musyimi CW, Comas-Herrera A. (2020) Impact and mortality of COVID-19 on people living with dementia: cross-country report. LTCcovid.org, International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPECLSE, 19 August 2020. Available at : <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/International-report-on-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-people-living-with-dementia-19-August-2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The Federal Council, portal of the Swiss government, Coronavirus: extension du droit à l’allocation pour perte de gain aux cas de rigueur, 16 April 2020. Available in French at : <https://www.admin.ch/gov/fr/accueil/documentation/communiques.msg-id-78813.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)