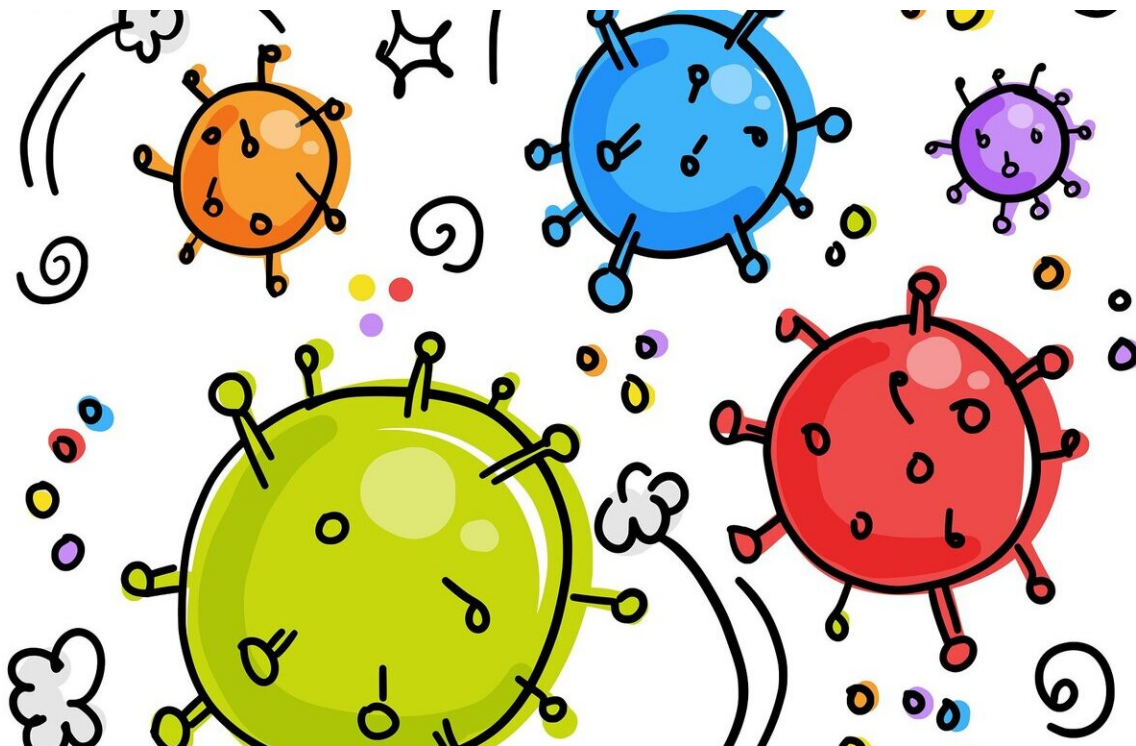


At least 50 COVID cases in Belgian meat plant

August 6 2020



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At least 50 employees from a Belgian pork plant have tested positive for the coronavirus, including cross-border workers from France, the local mayor said Thursday.

All 225 workers from the meat-cutting department at the giant

Westvlees meat processing works in Staden, western Belgium, were placed into home quarantine on Wednesday.

They are all to be given COVID-19 tests and, by Thursday evening, of 164 known results, 50 were positive, Staden's bourgmestre Francesco Vanderjeugd told AFP.

"We are waiting for more results," he said, when asked if the quarantine would be extended to the entire 850-strong workforce at the facility.

"We will be testing on a larger scale within the company."

Out of the first six testing results, which triggered the alert on wednesday, two French workers were infected. The plant also employs many Romanians.

"At this instant I don't have the location of the where the 50 live. It's also possible that there's a lot of people that live in France," Vanderjeugd said.

The mayor said he had already contacted the Romanian consul to make him aware of the threat to his citizens.

Abattoirs and meat-packing plants have become infection hotspots in other countries as the world deals with the epidemic, which has killed more than 700,000 worldwide.

Belgium has one of the highest per capita rates of COVID-19 in the world and infections are again rising after earlier success in bringing the epidemic under control.

Out of a population of around 11 million, 9,859 have died.

As nervous European governments consider reintroducing controls to head off a feared second wave of infections, many are looking at Belgium as a [potential threat](#).

Westvlees is one of Europe's biggest producers of fresh and processed pork. It butchers 1.4 million pigs a year and supplies 140,000 tonnes of meat to clients worldwide.

"850 people work here, and the only production unit where we have had positive cases was the cutting room, where 225 people work," company spokesman Manuel Goderis said.

"The site can continue to operate, but the 225 people who are quarantined at home will not be working with us until next week," he added.

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Citation: At least 50 COVID cases in Belgian meat plant (2020, August 6) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-08-covid-cases-belgian-meat.html>

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