

# Pressures on Euro 2020 hosts led to less effective COVID-19 measures, study finds

April 28 2022

---



EURO2020 games at Wembley Stadium. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Measures designed to reduce transmission of COVID-19 at Euro 2020

matches may not have been as effective due to the multiple pressures faced by host cities, a new study has found.

Research led by the University of Stirling identified a range of factors that led to the compromising of public health procedures at stadia used for the competition. It found that the ambition for higher attendances at latter stage fixtures, the differing local and national regulations, and the emotion of supporters combined with difficulties in recruiting and training an appropriate number of stewards at venues posed significant challenges to organizers.

The evidence emerged from interviews with key stakeholders who were involved in the planning stages and operation of venues for the tournament, which was held across several European cities in 2021 following a postponement due to the pandemic.

The findings of the study will be presented to delegates at Wembley Stadium today [Thursday 28 April].

Dr. Richard Purves, of the Institute for Social Marketing and Health at Stirling, led the research and he believes that the recommendations will help enhance health and safety provision at major events in the future—including at the Commonwealth Games, Rugby League World Cup, and UEFA Women's Euro 2022, which are all scheduled to take place in the UK later this year.

He said: "Euro 2020 was the first sporting mega event to take place during the pandemic and was considered a pilot for returning to 'normal life' without increasing the risk of infections or hospitalizations. However, our multidisciplinary research found significant challenges in the implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures, a lack of compliance from spectators, and, in some cases, friction between the governing body and the local organizing structures.

"In recent months, we have seen the easing of COVID-19 restrictions across the UK—however, major events will still be required to factor in mitigation measures to their plans, given transmission risks and the possibility of further variants. Our study makes a number of recommendations which will help organizers of mega events to better plan and implement COVID-19 mitigation measures, and general safety provision, for future events."

## **Research**

The study was split into three parts—the first an analysis of policy documents, emerging evidence, and stakeholder views; the second an online questionnaire of more than 500 spectators who attended UK-based Euro 2020 matches; and the third observation and data collection at 12 matches played during the competition at Wembley and Hampden.

The research team found that the multi-city format made it challenging for UEFA to standardize its approach to COVID-19 mitigation, with study participants reporting disagreements between the governing body and the local organizing structures over public health procedures.

Hampden operated at 25% of full capacity, while Wembley allowed 25% for the group stage, 50% for the knockouts, and 75% for the semi-finals and final matches. Some stakeholders who were interviewed for the study suggested that host cities may have felt "pressured" to achieve a minimum capacity of 25%, with political pressure potentially compromising public health recommendations on social distancing. The authors write: "UEFA were keen for higher attendances at showpiece matches. As stadium capacities increased, it became even more difficult to enforce mitigation measures."

Furthermore, the researchers found that the emotion of supporters made it difficult to achieve full compliance with the measures in place, with

rules not always enforced due to concerns it might lead to disorder among crowds. The authors wrote: "Limited intervention from stewards meant that those who did not comply with measures went unchallenged."

Spectators' adherence to staggered stadium entry decreased as the competition progressed, with most spectators reporting they found it "very" or "quite" difficult to socially distance on arrival at Wembley for the semi-finals and final. Meanwhile, 65% of respondents did not wear a face covering at any point during the semi-finals, rising to 68% for the final.

## **Recommendations**

The researchers recommend that, in future, event organizers form working groups with public health experts, [local authorities](#), government advisers and spectators to embed [best practices](#), including guidance provided by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority on health and biohazards, for reducing COVID-19 transmission, and that their plans remain agile to adapt to any changes in legislation.

Spectators must be provided with clear, up to date information regarding entry procedures and mitigation. Ticketing and entry processes must be clear and straightforward, with information held in one place—not across multiple checkpoints, apps or websites—and staggered entry is required while vaccination status and proof of a negative test are checked.

Mitigation measures within stadia must be enforced, and to do so, de-escalation training for staff is required to avoid disorder, and egress procedures need to be implemented to ensure safe departure from events. In addition, measures should incorporate international and local transport links, as well as primary access routes to venues from main transport hubs.

The research team will publish their findings in peer-reviewed papers in the coming months.

Provided by University of Stirling

Citation: Pressures on Euro 2020 hosts led to less effective COVID-19 measures, study finds (2022, April 28) retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-pressures-euro-hosts-effective-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.