

Interview with Covid Office Director Bruno Bartolomé ▶ He predicts new stage of pandemic



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The director of the covid office, Bruno Bartolomé.

Bruno Bartolomé

Director of the covid office

«The bulk of the population is part of the solution to the global pandemic»

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The mandate of the covid office is to control the traceability of infected people and their contacts to prevent the uncontrolled spread of the virus. After the download of the cases, the transfer to the Health portfolio and the terms of operation of the device, the director, Bruno Bartolomé, carries out a balance and a forecast of the road-map.

–Is the covid over?

–No way. Society must be prudent in this regard and not declare victory too soon. Covid continues to generate significant numbers and the virus continues to circulate. While it is true that the decline has been evident for weeks, we must not forget that we have an average of 70 infections a day.

–How do you assess the new measures of the health authorities?

–It seems logical to me that the restrictive measures have been eased as the low incidence allows it and the sanitary pressure continues to fall. The situation must begin to be normalized within the parameters set by the health authorities.

–Has there been any change in the work they are carrying out at the moment?

–We are doing the same job but with less cash. In this sense, StopLabs is also adapting to the number of cases and, since February, instead of having three active devices, we only have one in Andorra la Vella. The Pas de la Casa point is still active once a week to ensure coverage of the northern part of the country. The team currently consists of eight plotters, three data analysis techniques, four StopLab operations and three administrative. It should be noted that during the strongest stage of the omicron we were 45 tracers.

–Is it currently accompanied by all active cases?

–Today, a process is being carried out to support people in the younger and older age groups, as they are the most vulnerable groups.

–Are there any new projects underway?

–We are taking various initiatives to increase the efficiency of the service to the citizen. First of all, we are developing a new web portal that includes a binding record of the tests carried out in pharmacies



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and laboratories in order to centralize all the official diagnoses of the Principality. This website has been running since Monday last week. On the other hand, professionals are carrying out a thorough process of reviewing positive contacts and the database to avoid duplication and to correct errors that originated during the sixth wave. In this sense, a very important work is being done on archiving and cataloging paper dossiers and computer records. We are also introducing new data to the covid observatory for the incidence of persistent coronavirus through telephone surveys. We need to take advantage of case reduction to improve our tools, innovate and be more efficient in future stages.

–Do you think that there is a profile of new infected people?

–We have not detected a specific profile regarding the new infected. In fact, in recent weeks we have been detecting prevalence in all age groups without highlighting a specific group. However, we must also be careful in this regard because it has been shown that coronavirus can always surprise us.

–The sixth wave was a bit chaotic

and from the office some mistakes were admitted when executing control and diagnostic measures. What exactly happened?

–First of all, it should be noted that during those months we experienced an excessively high volume of incidence. Errors occur in all processes, and this was no exception. The higher the number of cases and diagnoses to evaluate, the greater the error that can occur. The omission of the omicron required a quick response from the covid office and caused some punctual errors. I would also like to point out that a large number of professionals intervened during the heaviest part of the sixth wave; in this sense, every effort was made to respond as quickly as possible.

–Apart from the diagnostic errors, what impact would you highlight?

–The automatic termination system. Like the diagnostics, the program started running at full capacity on the second update, after making sure it had the necessary adjustments. The citizens, who are the first to be interested in making this system work, sent us their doubts and concerns, which helped us a lot.

-Do you think that at some point there was a situation of collapse?

-We are convinced that no tragic situation occurred during the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022. The moment when no response is given to the population can be described as a collapse. What happened to us was delays in responding. While it is true that we are 48 to 72 hours behind in the verdict of some evidence, citizens have never been left out. An attempt was made to respond as soon as possible, and this was done.

-Have you been able to talk to the future Minister of Health, Albert Font?

-We are still waiting for Minister Benazet to take over. As soon as we are at the forefront of the Health portfolio, we will look for a time to hold a comprehensive meeting to clarify the roadmap of the covid office and establish the new projects we have left to do. We also want to update the calendar and set priorities by the end of the year.

-In relation to the Ministry of Health, Minister Benazet stated that the population should get used to living with the coronavirus as if it were a traveling companion.

-I agree. In fact, the coexistence part is where we are right now and we are starting to lose our fear, but we can never lose respect and preventive measures, as we are not sure if a new mutation will occur. In any case, this calm will help us to live much better among the citizens. It will then be necessary to assess the loss of immunity after months and the seasonal incidence in spring.

-It was said that the office would be maintained until June this year. Do you think it could be closed sooner as cases are gradually declining?

-We will have to wait for the new guidelines of the new minister first. Subsequently, the incidence and development of the pandemic will have to be assessed during the months of April and May with the arrival of good weather. At this time, we have no further information on the future of the covid office, but we believe that it needs to be continued as more situations of virological risk may occur. Needless to say, as long as the government deems it necessary, we will continue to be part of the shield of protection for citizens.

-How would you define the attitude of the citizens during these more than two years of pandemic?

-How has the covid office in Andorra differed from the tracking systems in other countries?

-I believe that most of the population has behaved in an exemplary manner during all stages of the coronavirus, both in total quarantine and in the relaxation of prevention measures and social interaction. We are a small society that is both supportive and responsible. People have followed the recommendations of the health authorities in most cases. The bulk of the population is part of the solution to the global pandemic. In this sense, citizen participation has been key in the Principality, as, as an example, it has been shown that the macro-bottlenecks that have occurred in neighboring countries have had fatal consequences.

-What do you think the citizens think about the actions of the government and the office?

-I think the general perception is that a good job has been done by the institutions and the covid office except for the occasional mistakes. On the other hand, it should be noted that the surveys are enlightening. More than 80% of citizens value the actions of health authorities positively.

-When do you think the pandemic will be officially ended?

-I do not have the capacity to set a date for the end of the pandemic. We are part of a network of international collaboration and health cooperation. The scientific committees will have to determine when we enter a new virological phase. In any case, we must continue to work for a safe environment, ensure public health and keep on guard. Global decisions belong to the World Health Organization. Personally, I think we are entering the final phase, but we cannot sing victory ahead of time, as covid can put us in a new scenario of uncertainty at any time. ≡



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“Mistakes are made in every process; with a higher number of cases, the error will be bigger»

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