

ANNOUNCEMENT AFTER THE MEETING OF CRASP COORDINATORS FOR COMBATING COVID-19

On November 26, 2021, a weekly meeting of CRASP Coordinators for counteracting the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic was held. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and the President of the Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland.

In light of the current data on the pandemic situation in Polish universities, the following conclusions were formulated. The increase in infections in the academic community increases concerns about the possibility of continuing regular education. It is also expressed in the growing anxiety of many employees and students taking the form of postulates, appeals and speeches addressed to rectors, the Minister of Education and Science and other entities. They express understandable and justified fears. However, they are often not based on a reliable and comprehensive picture of the situation of a given university. It should be recognized that the resignation from education held at universities should be a last resort, preceded by a careful assessment of all the consequences related to it. Suspension of classes, in the absence of any restrictions in other areas of life, may prove ineffective in counteracting the pandemic, despite the significant loss it would cause in the quality of education.

The available data do not indicate that vaccinated persons in the academic community are exposed to a higher level of risk than in any other area of life. Even in those European countries where more severe restrictions were introduced in many areas of the economy and social life, universities still conduct classes with appropriate strict sanitary standards. In the opinion of CRASP Coordinators, the general pandemic situation at universities still does not justify the systemic suspension of education in the walls of universities, and any decisions regarding individual universities should be undertaken by rectors and result from an individual assessment of a particularly high level of risk and other conditions at a given university.

Such decisions should not be made under the pressure of individuals but should be subject to extensive consultation with representative bodies of the university, preceded by a thorough analysis of the actual situation and all reasons constituting the best interest of the entire academic community.

It should be recommended that important decisions regarding education should be taken at the level of university authorities (even if, based on the diverse situation of individual internal units of a given university, such decisions would result in different solutions for these units), and, if possible, coordinated and consulted with other universities. It will create an opportunity to avoid inconsistent responses in the face of a similar epidemic situation, which could contribute to a further increase in tensions and conflicts within the academic community. The growing number of infections affecting the sense of security of students, doctoral students and employees at individual universities should also justify further intensification of activities aimed at increasing the level of vaccination of community members, as often as possible testing, enforcing sanitary rigours and adequately prompt and effective response to the emergence of infection outbreaks (including introducing temporary distance learning).

CRASP National Coordinator for Covid-19

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