Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on STIs in Greece

Restrictive measures due to COVID-19 outbreak resulted in unprecedented modifications in healthcare services and social life. We reviewed records from two referral centres in Greece to identify newly diagnosed cases of gonorrhoea and syphilis from 1 March 2020 to 30 October 2020 and compared them with the respective numbers of the same period in 2019. The total number of new syphilis and gonorrhoea diagnoses in 2020 was 423 versus 521 in 2019. Syphilis cases in 2020 were significantly lower compared with 2019 (306 vs 340, respectively, p=0.02, 10% reduction). Similarly, there were 113 versus 179 gonorrhoea cases in 2020 and 2019, respectively (p=0.01, 36.9% reduction). The number of heterosexuals was significantly lower compared with 2019.1 In Switzerland, syphilis and gonorrhoea diagnoses were accordingly reduced by 84.8% and 16.5% in 2020 versus 2019.3 In China, new syphilis diagnoses in 2020 were reduced by 8.2% as compared with 2019.3 Data from all countries converge to the conclusion that considerably fewer STIs were diagnosed in 2020 as compared with 2019.

The latter maybe attributed to limited access or unwillingness of patients to visit a hospital in the fear of COVID-19 transmission. Social distancing and banned entertainment activities may further contribute to the reduction. Interestingly, in Greece, STDs’ numbers in MSM remained unchanged in 2020 versus 2019, possibly reflecting less affected sexual behaviour in this population. Considering potential long-term consequences of undiagnosed STDs, our results highlight the need of uninterrupted testing and treatment of STDs during a pandemic.

Zoe Apalla,1 Aimitios Lallas,2 Styliani Mastrafis,1 Anastassios Giannoukos,3 Despoina Noutkari,4 Maria Goula,4 Polychronia Kalantzis,3 Maria Zapridou,4 Konstantinos Lallas,2 Athanassios Kyridis,3 Elizabeth Lazaridou,2,6 Alexander Stratigos,3 Theodoros Sidirooulos,4 Elektra Nicolaidou1

1Second Dermatology Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki, Greece
2First Dermatology Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, Greece
31st Department of Dermatology and Venereology, Andreas Syggros University Hospital of Athens, Athens, Greece
4State Dermatology Department, Hospital of Skin and Venereal Diseases, Thessaloniki, Greece
5Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, Greece

Correspondence to Professor Zoe Apalla, Second Dermatology Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki 54124, Greece; zoimrd@yahoo.gr

Handling editor Anna Maria Geretti

Contributors All the listed authors meet the criteria for authorship, based on the recommendations of The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals (ICMJE Recommendations 2018). ZA and AL equally contributed in the preparation of the manuscript and share the first author position. TS and EN equally contributed in their role as senior authors and share senior authorship.

Funding The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent for publication Not required.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

This article is made freely available for use in accordance with BMJ’s website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may use, download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.

Competing interests None declared.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

This article is made freely available for use in accordance with BMJ’s website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may use, download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.

Zoe Apalla,1 Aimitios Lallas,2 Styliani Mastrafis,1 Anastassios Giannoukos,3 Despoina Noutkari,4 Maria Goula,4 Polychronia Kalantzis,3 Maria Zapridou,4 Konstantinos Lallas,2 Athanassios Kyridis,3 Elizabeth Lazaridou,2,6 Alexander Stratigos,3 Theodoros Sidirooulos,4 Elektra Nicolaidou1

1Second Dermatology Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki, Greece
2First Dermatology Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, Greece
31st Department of Dermatology and Venereology, Andreas Syggros University Hospital of Athens, Athens, Greece
4State Dermatology Department, Hospital of Skin and Venereal Diseases, Thessaloniki, Greece
5Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, Greece

Correspondence to Professor Zoe Apalla, Second Dermatology Department, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Faculty of Health Sciences, Thessaloniki 54124, Greece; zoimrd@yahoo.gr

Handling editor Anna Maria Geretti

Contributors All the listed authors meet the criteria for authorship, based on the recommendations of The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals (ICMJE Recommendations 2018). ZA and AL equally contributed in the preparation of the manuscript and share the first author position. TS and EN equally contributed in their role as senior authors and share senior authorship.

Funding The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent for publication Not required.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

This article is made freely available for use in accordance with BMJ’s website terms and conditions for the duration of the covid-19 pandemic or until otherwise determined by BMJ. You may use, download and print the article for any lawful, non-commercial purpose (including text and data mining) provided that all copyright notices and trade marks are retained.

To cite Apalla Z, Lallas A, Mastrafis S, et al. Sex Transm Infect 2021;0:0. doi:10.1136/sextrans-2021-054965

Received 8 January 2021
Revised 25 January 2021
Accepted 5 February 2021

Sex Transm Infect 2021;0:0.

doi:10.1136/sextrans-2021-054965

Ethics approval Not required.

Conflicts of interest None declared.

Funding None.

ORCID iDs Zoe Apalla http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9255-8196
Elizabeth Lazaridou http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4072-3591

REFERENCES
3 Chia CC, Chao CM, Lai CC. Diagnoses of syphilis and HIV infection during the COVID-19 pandemic in Taiwan. Sex Transm Infect.