

## **The district of North Friesland is silent on exact Covid-19 numbers on Sylt. Kiel anxiety researcher Ulrich Hoinkes thinks this is wrong.**

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The corona virus continues to spread in Schleswig-Holstein: Approximately two weeks after the first case on Sylt tested positive for the sars-CoV-2 virus became known, the number of infected people has probably increased. However, the district of North Friesland has not yet released exact infection figures for the island. The published Covid-19 figures refer to the entire district area and are only subdivided into the North Frisian islands, which also include Föhr and Amrum, and the North Frisian mainland, but not localised. The Kiel anxiety researcher Professor Ulrich Hoinkes takes a critical view of this silence and instead advocates absolute transparency of the corona case numbers on Sylt so as not to increase the insecurity of the islanders.

Sylt's mayor Nikolas Häckel, on the other hand, supports the position of the district health office. The aim is to prevent a "gauntlet run" for the sick and prevent speculation about possible infected persons on the island. "As a worst-case scenario, I and my team assume that the published figures for the islands simply concern Sylt - this is perfectly adequate for emergency measures and for pandemic planning," says the head of administration.

As of Wednesday, April 1, 42 people are in quarantine on the North Frisian islands, the district announced. Twelve of them have tested positive for corona. Another person was already considered to have recovered.

Hans-Martin Slopianka, spokesperson of the North Frisia district, is sure why the exact location of the confirmed cases in the district area is not stated: "We want to protect those affected. Imagine if we were to publish that there are one or two cases in a village. Then the whole village might start speculating about who it might be. It is therefore not important for one's own behaviour to know the exact whereabouts of the confirmed cases, because "the virus is circulating invisibly and partially undetected anyway, everyone should follow the instructions for behaviour - regardless of whether there is a confirmed case in the immediate vicinity", says Slopianka. Publishing the exact numbers could even have a negative effect: "Some people who read the case number zero for their own place of residence may then feel too safe and stop following the rules and recommendations. This must be prevented." In exceptional cases, for example if the risk of infection for the population suddenly increases in a community because of many cases, the district will "naturally report".

Professor Ulrich Hoinkes from the University of Kiel advocates that this exception should become the rule. He is researching anxiety as a cultural phenomenon - not just since the Corona crisis. "I am strictly against not publishing the corona case numbers for Sylt. Transparency is the basic premise of our democracy." There must be clear individual figures for each island, but also with expert advice on how to evaluate these regional case numbers during the pandemic. It is precisely now that people should be given the opportunity to obtain detailed information. "It is counterproductive not to mention the numbers in a localized way, because this does not help to calm people down, but on the contrary, it causes uncertainty and increases the feeling of powerlessness," says the expert. It is particularly important now to build up a factual counterweight to emotional, affective action. However, Hoinkes says that the identity of those affected must be protected. "The name and address of those infected must be protected." Witch hunts, where speculations are made about presumably infected people, would unfortunately already take place on the island as well as on the mainland. Sylt is no exception. On Facebook, among others, the origin of possible infected persons has been discussed for days.