

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the trends of Sexually transmitted infections in Belgium.

Results of an STI clinic

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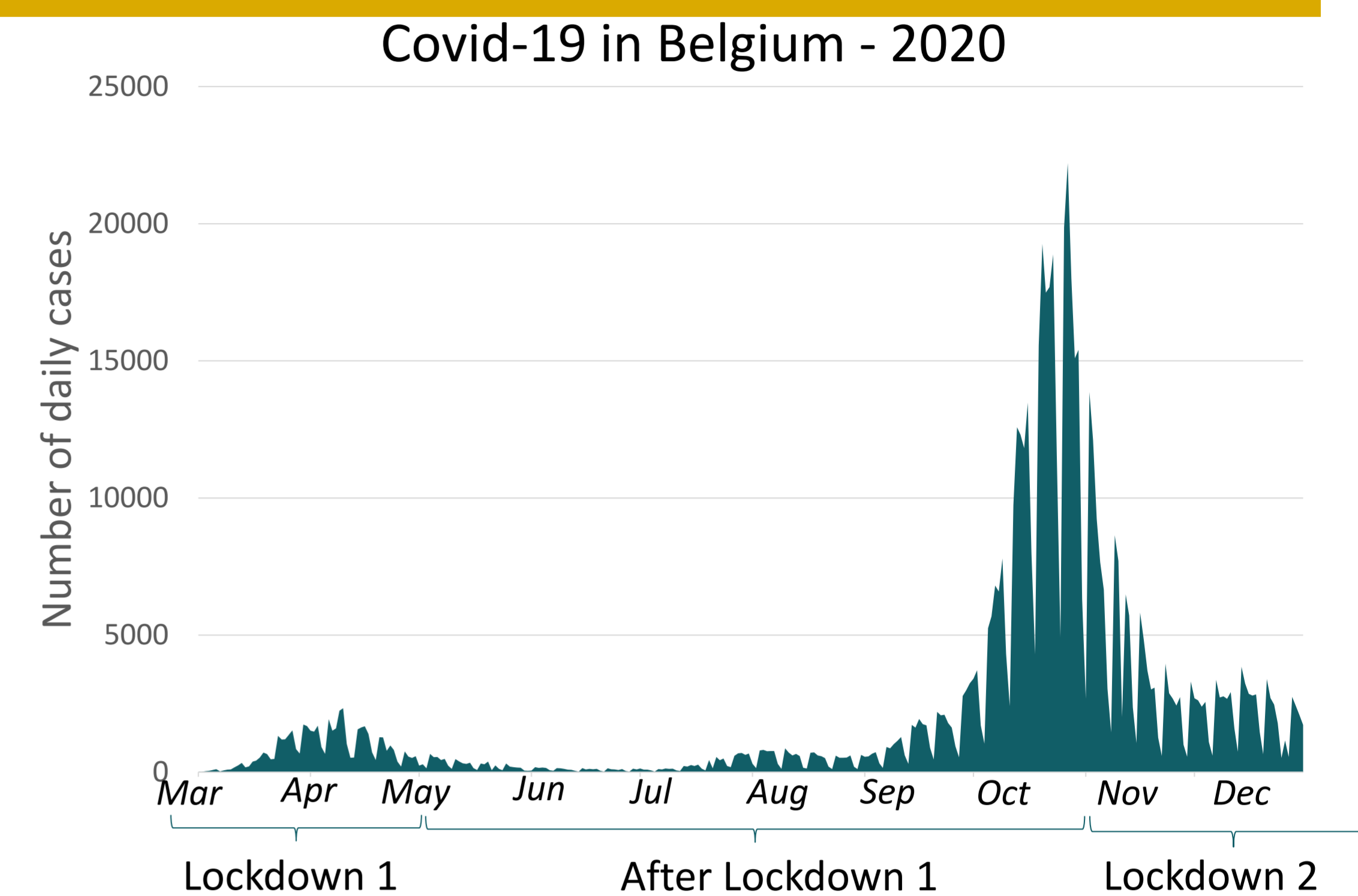
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BACKGROUND - BELGIAN COVID-19 EPIDEMIC 2020 & MEASURES

Time period	Restriction measures
Pre-lockdown 1 (01-01-17/03)	• None
Lockdown 1 (LD1) (18/03-10/05)	• Stay at home • Only essential travel • No social contacts beyond the household • Only essential healthcare services (e.g. for symptomatic STIs only)
After lockdown 1 (after-LD1) (11/05-01/11)	• Reopening non-essential healthcare services (HIV & PrEP* follow-up, low-threshold HIV/STI testing center) • Increase in social contacts varying between 2-10 • Commercial sex clubs and sauna's remained closed
Lockdown 2 (LD2) (02/11-31/12)	• Only 1 close contact + another contact but with physical distancing • Non-essential healthcare services remained open



*PrEP: pre-exposure prophylaxis

AIM

To explore whether the different restriction measures had an impact on the trends of the number of tests and diagnoses of *Chlamydia trachomatis*/*Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (CT/NG) of an Antwerp STI clinic before, during, and after the two lockdowns in Belgium in 2020.

METHODS

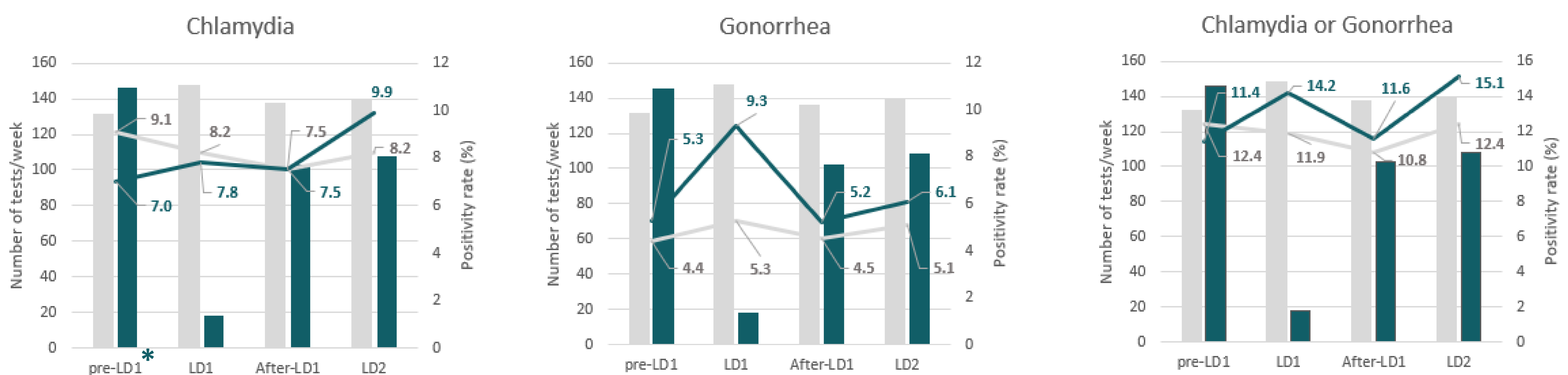
STI clinic: large cohort of PrEP users (n=1000) & HIV cohort (n=3000) including low-threshold clinic for free-of-charge HIV/STI testing.

Statistical analysis:

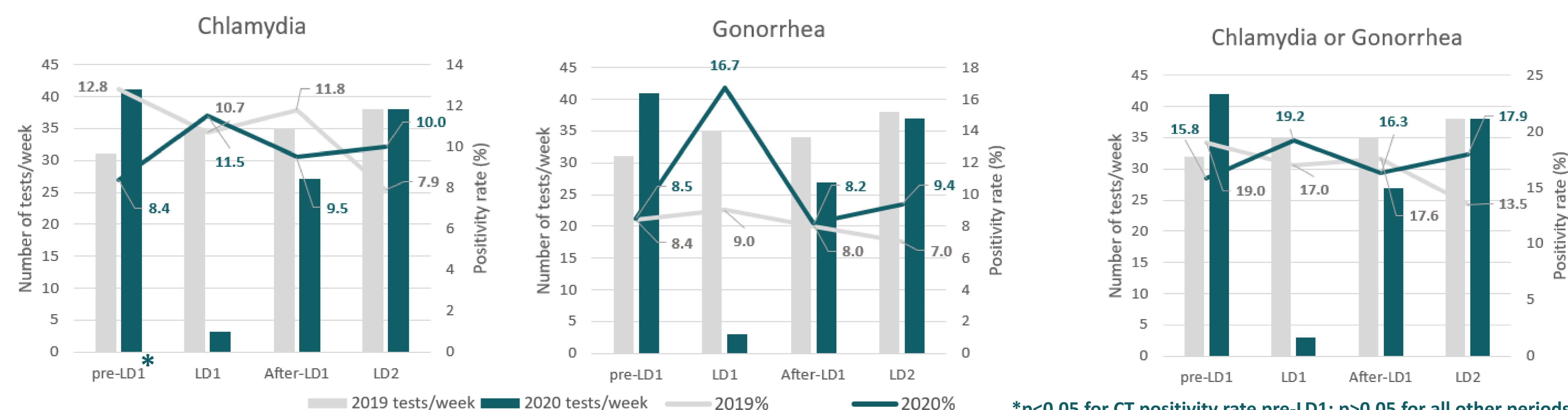
- Number of weekly CT/NG tests, number of positive CT/NG cases and positivity rate for both STIs of the different time periods were compared with the same periods in 2019.
- Mixed-effects logistic regression to explore statistical significant changes between CT/NG diagnosis rates in both years and between the corresponding time periods.

RESULTS

Whole clinic cohort



PrEP users only



*p<0,05 for CT positivity rate pre-LD1; p>0,05 for all other periods

CONCLUSION

- No significant differences in CT/NG positivity rates between restricted vs non-restricted periods.
- After initial dramatic decrease in weekly CT/NG test (87%) during LD1 (closure non-essential services), testing and positivity rates returned to 'normal' rates. In fact, the highest CT/NG positivity rate was found during lockdown 2 for the whole clinic cohort and PrEP users only, which may depict physical distancing fatigue and reduction of corona-anxiety.