



After negotiations collapsed in 2021

Switzerland and the EU resume negotiations

The European Union and Switzerland are seeking to reach a new agreement on their bilateral relations. Bern made its negotiating mandate public in mid-March, and the EU Council subsequently gave the green light. Talks are set to begin already in March. Switzerland broke off the negotiations for a framework agreement in 2021. The Swiss press is by no means in agreement on whether the new initiative is a good idea. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* commented: "... A close, but not too close relationship with the EU remains the most promising way forward. A pure free trade agreement along the lines of the British model is not an alternative for a country with 16 cantons bordering the EU. The status quo is being questioned in Switzerland and abroad, and relying on it is risky."

Source: Eurotopics

EU Health Data Space

Citizens can object to data sharing

The European Health Data Space has been adopted. Anyone who does not want their data to be included can object, with a few exceptions. In March, the European Parliament and the Council agreed to create a European Health Data Space (EHDS). The aim is to provide citizens with a digital patient file that can be accessed throughout the EU and is intended to improve care across national borders, making it easier to access prescriptions, images, laboratory tests and other data. It also provides for an opt-out from data sharing "[...] except for the secondary use of data for public interest, policy-making, statistical and research purposes." The agreement still needs to be formally adopted by both institutions before it can enter into force. "The European Health Data Space will put citizens in control of their personal health data by providing a secure framework for storing and accessing their data, which can be accessed anywhere in the EU, thus improving healthcare at national and cross-border level", said Tomislav Sokol, co-rapporteur of the Environment Committee (ENVI). "We have managed [...] to include significant additions to the protection of sensitive personal data, in particular with the possibility for patients to opt in to both primary and secondary use of their health data", said Annalisa Tardino, co-rapporteur of the Civil Liberties Committee (LIBE).

Source: heise online

European Union

Belgium takes over the presidency

On 1 January 2024, Belgium took over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union from the Czech Republic for the next six months. The motto of this event is: "Protect, strengthen, prepare". The Belgians intend to pursue the following six priorities: defending rule of law, democracy, and unity; strengthening the EU's competitiveness; pursuing a green and just transition; reinforcing the EU's social and health agenda; protecting people and borders; promoting a global Europe. Health remains an important policy area under the Belgian presidency. In particular, the Belgians want to strengthen the EU's resilience to future health threats by optimising existing crisis management tools, supporting national health systems and improving the safety of the supply of medicines. In this context, the creation of a European Health Data Space (EHDS) is to be completed and the revision of EU pharmaceutical legislation is to be continued—the two main ongoing legislative initiatives. In addition, the Belgian Presidency intends to address the shortage of healthcare professionals and to combat the shortage of medicines.

Source: European Union

6–9 June 2024 in 27 Member States

European elections



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From 6 to 9 June 2024, some 373 million EU citizens will vote for the 720 members of the next European Parliament. The European Elections Act stipulates that elections to the European Parliament take place every five years from Thursday to Sunday. The 2024 European elections will be held in all 27 Member States from Thursday, 6 June to Sunday, 9 June. Some Member States have not yet officially announced their election dates. Preliminary results will be announced on Sunday evening. The European elections are organised according to the rules of each Member State. However, the Member States must comply with certain common provisions laid down in EU law. Among other things, the election must be based on the proportional representation system. The voting age is also set by the Member States. In most EU countries, voters can vote from the age of 18—except in Greece, where the age limit is 17, and in Belgium, Germany, Malta and Austria, where it is 16. The minimum age for standing as a candidate in the European elections is between 18 and 25. The European Parliament is the only EU institution that is directly elected by its citizens. It is therefore also the only institution that is directly accountable to the people. It can also hold the other EU institutions to account.

Source: European Parliament/EU

Evidence-based oral hygiene recommendations

What the FDI recommends for tooth-brushing

The FDI World Dental Federation has worked with international experts to formulate evidence-based recommendations on toothbrushing methods and related behaviours for the general population. The use of electric versus manual toothbrushes, toothpastes, dental care for children and aids for interdental cleaning devices were evaluated. Where evidence was insufficient, a consensus involving FDI Standing Committees and the Council was reached to make recommendations based on best practice rather than evidence alone. The findings were published in the *International Dental Journal*.

The aim of this work was to achieve a professional consensus on toothbrushing methods and the associated oral-hygiene behaviours and to develop evidence-informed recommendations. The FDI consists of 200 national dental associations and specialty groups in more than 130 countries and is the principal representative body of more than 1 million dentists worldwide.

The consensus was that teeth should be brushed twice a day for about two minutes with a toothpaste containing fluoride, especially at bedtime. Parents should complete brushing their children's teeth until they are skilled enough to brush on their own. It is good practice to simply spit out excess toothpaste after brushing and not to rinse with water to maintain fluoride concentration levels. If a mouth rinse is used, it should be used at a time other than immediately after brushing. The effectiveness of both manual and power toothbrushes is influenced by user technique.

Regarding interdental cleaning, the data were unclear, and the panel had different opinions. It was agreed that interdental brushes, single-tuft brushes and dental floss are all options for cleaning and should be selected based on interproximal size and effectiveness within the space following professional advice.

The FDI recommends fluoridated toothpaste with an age-appropriate concentration (1,000 to 1,500 ppm for adults). The study also reflected the international variations in product availability. Higher fluoride concentrations (up to 5,000 ppm) may be useful for some patient groups (e.g. during treatment with fixed orthodontic appliances) as a supplement to home oral hygiene, according to the manufacturer's instructions.

However, for some fluoride formulations, no clear statement could be made about the caries-preventive effect because the evidence was insufficient.

Sources: *zm-online.de*, FDI

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