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Sixty seconds on . . . Wembley

Zosia Kmietowicz

Is football coming home?

Yes, 60 000 footie fans have got the green light to go to Wembley Stadium for the UEFA Euro 2020 semi-finals and final on 6, 7, and 11 July and will set a new record for the largest crowds assembled at a sporting event in the UK in over 15 months.¹

So, the results of the pilot trials have finally dribbled in?

Not quite. Despite the fact that many events in the government's "world leading events research programme" have now taken place—such as the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley on 17 April and the BRIT awards at the O2 in London on 11 May—publication of the results remains elusive.

VAR needed!

Four pilots in Liverpool in April and May, which involved 13 258 people, were hailed a success by local health bosses who said that there was no substantial spread of the virus around the festivals and nightclub events.² Only five people were turned away because they had a positive lateral flow test (LFT) before an event. Of the 25% and 43% of attendees who took up offers of polymerase chain reaction tests on the day of the event and five days later, just four tested positive on the day and seven after the event.

It's a game of two halves, isn't it?

LFTs have attracted as much controversy as a penalty decision. Jon Deeks, professor of biostatistics at the University of Birmingham, said for all attendees LFTs would have missed 70% of cases (5 out of 17). The numbers were small because the prevalence of covid-19 in Liverpool at the time was low.

Sounds like a schoolboy error

It's no secret that Deeks thinks LFTs are not match fit. Using them to screen people for infection is contrary to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) exceptional use authorisation, he says. "The government are authorising themselves to use the test for this purpose at Wembley by labelling the Euro 2020 final as a research study."

They think it's all over . . .

"Negative lateral flow tests will not make Wembley safe," says Deeks. "The risk will depend on the numbers who attend who are infected—which is now likely to be higher than at the Liverpool events because of the spread of the delta variant. For the sake of public health, the government needs to pay attention to the MHRA authorisation and the evidence that exists of the failure of these tests to detect many with infection, a fair number of whom are likely to be infectious."

1 Government announces more than 60 000 fans permitted to attend Euro 2020 semi-finals. June 2021. www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-more-than-60000-fans-permitted-to-attend-euro-2020-semi-finals.

2 Thorp L. Liverpool covid pilot events "had no impact" on virus spread. Liverpool Echo. May 2021. www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/liverpool-covid-pilot-events-had-20676455.