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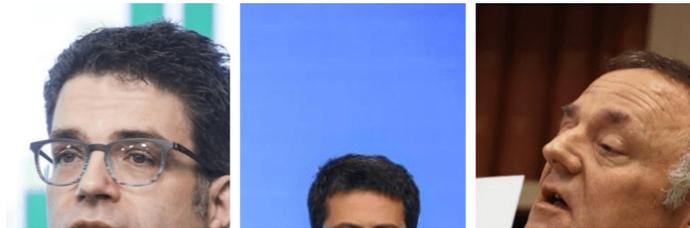
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Belgium's coronavirus experts get sign language names

Friday, 17 April 2020



Credit: © Belga

Belgium's coronavirus experts team have been given their own sign language names by members of an online mute-deaf community.

Members of a mute-deaf Facebook group came up with signs to name the health officials who have become the public faces of Belgium's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

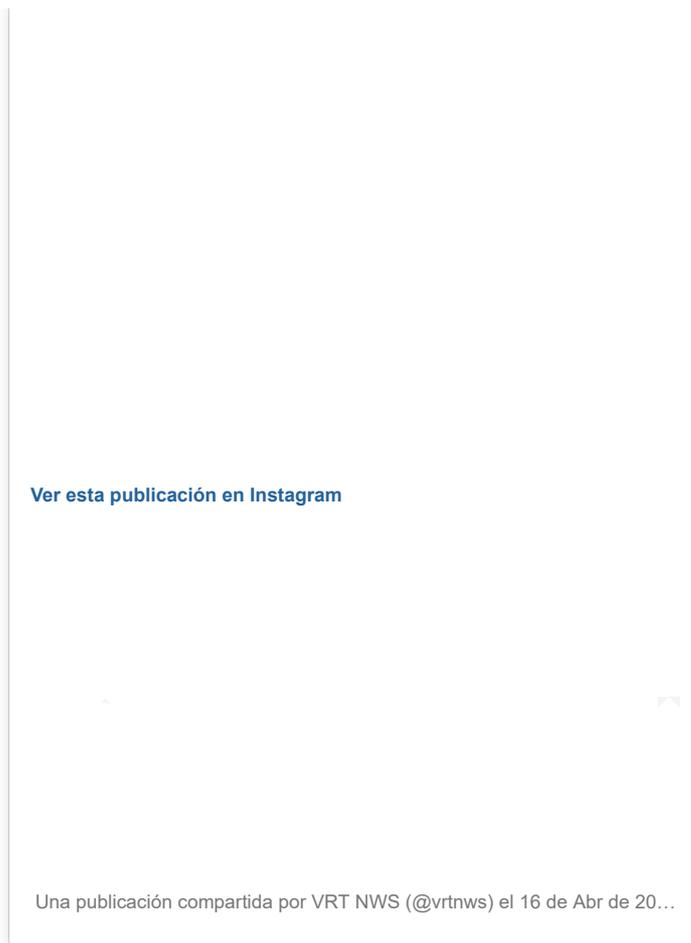
The team includes virologists Marc Van Ranst and Steven Van Gucht as well as Emmanuel André, a clinical biologist in the KU Leuven laboratory, and the spokespersons for Belgium's Crisis Centre, Yves Stevens and Benoît Ramacker.

A deaf group member shared proposed translations of the team's names into Flemish Sign Language, saying his partner had come up with it because it would make their conversations about the press conference easier, [VRT](#) reports.

"She came up with a gesture for [virologist Steven] Van Gucht which he thought was quite good, that's why he asked the rest of the group for opinions," Els Demarre, VRT sign language interpreter said.

The names given to them draw from a distinctive trait or a personal characteristic, such as the V-neck sweaters of Van Ranst or the checkered shirts of André.

While the name gestures were thought up in an informal setting between members of an affinity Facebook group, the officials who are tasked with live-translation of the press conferences have since adopted, and thus officialised them.



Marc Van Ranst

While The Dutch-speaking virologist does not take part in the daily press conferences, his media profile has risen considerably since the start of the epidemic, as he goes on news shows and gives radio interviews to deliver insights into how the government is managing the outbreak.

His trademark V-neck sweaters have caught the eye of the public and were also chosen as the main feature for his Flemish name sign, with the gesture for naming him consisting of mouthing the word “Marc” while mimicking a V-shape down the middle of the chest.

Steven Van Gucht

A downwards gesture made with the thumb at one corner of the mouth was chosen to name Steven Van Gucht, the virologist with public health institute Sciensano who delivers daily figures in Dutch.

The gesture was created to reference a scar that Van Gucht has on his lower lip.

Emmanuel André

Charged with updating the French-speaking public on the daily evolution of the pandemic, André can often be seen wearing a plaid shirt.

The name sign given to him mimics the checkered pattern on the shirt by dragging four fingers across, then from top to bottom across the chest.

Benoit Ramacker and Yves Stevens

Ramacker and Stevens are the spokespersons of the country's Crisis

Centres, tasked with coordinating responses to nationwide crises such as the 2016 terror attacks.

The gesture to name Ramacker beings wit the five fingers of one hand pressed together while the palm faces down and continues by turning the palm upwards and opening up the fingers in a fluid motion.

The gesture chosen for Stevens uses two fingers of one hand and the palm of the other to mimic a person standing on a platform, and was chosen because the Dutch-speaking press officer often stands during the press conferences.

Gabriela Galindo
The Brussels Times

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