

Vaccination schedule for infants and COVID-19

Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine

April 28, 2020

Eleven vaccines have been made mandatory for children born from January 11, 2018. This measure significantly improved the vaccination coverage of infants in 2019, particularly against hepatitis B and meningitis, has significantly reduced the incidence of invasive meningococcal infections in younger infants.

The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in France has interrupted this beneficial development. Many parents have canceled vaccination appointments for their infants as well as their older children. Fear of contagion in waiting rooms, doubts about the effects of vaccination on immunity in a pandemic period, and then containment, has led to a sharp decrease in vaccinations, mainly in infants. On April 1, 2020, the French Health Authority issued an opinion so that the vaccination schedule would not be delayed. The EPI-PHARE report on the use of city drugs during the Covid-19 period reveals that penta and hexavalent vaccines for infants have fallen by 23% and that deliveries of MMR and HPV vaccines have dropped by 50 to 70% during the last two weeks of March 2020 [1].

This situation cannot continue. Infants must imperatively be vaccinated from the 2nd month, in order to acquire an effective protection as soon as possible against frequent and serious diseases at this age, particularly *Haemophilus influenzae b*, meningococcus and pneumococcus, whooping cough and invasive bacterial infections (septicemia and meningitis).

Any delay in applying the vaccination schedule exposes:

- every infant at risk of contracting these serious diseases due to a delay in acquiring individual vaccine protection;
- the entire child population at risk of measles outbreak and invasive bacterial infections due to a reduction in vaccination coverage and the collective protection it guarantees.

Faced with this worrying situation, the National Academy of Medicine recommends:

- to resume as soon as possible the consultations devoted to compulsory examinations with vaccination of the first two years of life, respecting the steps provided for the vaccination schedule;
- to catch up as soon as possible on the backlog of infant vaccinations that has been accumulated ;
- to never postpone the vaccination appointments and to organize appointment periods allowing to dissociate the consultations of sick children and the systematic examinations for vaccination;
- to reassure parents that barrier measures and hygiene are ensured in doctor offices and Maternal and Child Welfare services: fitted waiting room, admission of only one parent per child, disinfected surfaces, wearing of masks and use of hydro-alcoholic solutions;
- for children aged 5 years and over, to postpone vaccination appointments until the end of containment, maintaining the same barrier measures.

[1] EPI-PHARE. GIS ANSM-CNAM Usage des médicaments en ville en France durant l'épidémie de Covid-19 – point de situation à la fin mars 2020. (Urban drug use in France during the Covid-19 epidemic - situation at the end of March 2020) April 17 2020