

Vaccination against Covid-19, why hesitate?

Press Release of the French National Academy of Medicine

December 14, 2020

The scale and gravity of Covid-19 has led to an unprecedented mobilization of the international scientific community to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2. The results are spectacular: less than a year after the emergence of the pandemic, 180 candidate vaccines are under development, 48 of which are tested in human clinical trials, including 11 in phase 3.

The European Commission has entered into 6 pre-purchase agreements [1] to make nearly 1.5 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines available to Member States, including 200 million for France. Depending on the results of phase 3 clinical trials, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) could issue the first marketing authorizations (MAs) before the end of 2020, allowing the national vaccination campaign to begin in January 2021. As the primary objective of this campaign is to reduce the morbidity and mortality attributable to Covid-19, a priority order has been established by the French High Authority for Health (HAS), classifying in the initial phase those people most at risk of developing severe forms of the disease [2]. The unexpected proximity of this prospect awakens reluctance to get vaccinated, for which France would have the regrettable privilege of being the flag-bearer. According to the CoviPrev survey by Public Health France, the rate of people agreeing to be vaccinated fell from 64% in July to 53% in November. In addition to the general climate of anxiety that has increased in the population since the start of the pandemic, this development reflects a loss of confidence among citizens in the health authority and an unreasonable distrust of newly developed vaccines developed in record time but in compliance with health safety rules.

The caution expressed by some doctors anxious to know the final results of phase 3 trials, then claiming the lack of perspective to form an opinion, amplified and sometimes misled by the media, reinforces a feeling of mistrust among the general public.

The National Academy of Medicine which is aware of the confusion generated by the imminence of an unprecedented vaccination campaign, recalls:

- that Covid-19, in 10 months, has killed more than 1,600,000 people worldwide, including 57,000 in France, caused a global economic recession and worsened situations of extreme poverty;
- that, despite the strictest application of individual and collective prevention measures, no country has yet succeeded in eliminating SARS-CoV-2;
- that even in the countries most affected by the pandemic, levels of herd immunity are too low to expect a spontaneous slowing of the spread of the virus;

- that only the early initiation of a large-scale international vaccination campaign will make it possible to control the pandemic by 2021;
- that the performance of the first available vaccines using the new messenger RNA technology, produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, raises high hopes with a very favorable benefit/risk ratio, even though additional studies are still needed, particularly to clarify the duration of protection and the impact on transmission;
- that the authorization of a MA by the EMA, expected on December 29, will remove any reticence within the French medical profession and motivate all healthcare personnel to contribute to the success of the national vaccination program;
- that the widespread use of the electronic vaccination record will improve the efficiency and safety of this immense public health work [3].

[1] Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine "Vaccination against Covid-19: for hope can take shape! " November 16, 2020

[2] HAS. Vaccination strategy against Sars-Cov-2. Preliminary recommendations on the strategy for prioritizing the populations to be vaccinated. November 30, 2020

[3] Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine "To make a success of the national vaccination campaign against Covid-19, let's not forget the electronic vaccination record", December 3, 2020