

Vaccination against Covid: no longer time to wait
Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine
December 30, 2020

Contrary to most predictions and ahead of all expectations, the availability of an effective vaccine against Covid-19 was made possible before the end of 2020 following the approval given on 21 December by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and then the recommendation of 24 December by the French High Authority for Health (HAS), for the Comirnaty® vaccine (BNT162b2) using messenger RNA technology. In line with the HAS recommendations, the national vaccination programme, which began as everywhere else in the European Union on 27 December, is aimed first and foremost at the elderly and vulnerable people housed in nursing homes (EHPADs) and similar establishments, i.e. one million people who are due to be immunised in January and February 2021.

The need to set aside sufficient time for obtaining consent and looking for possible contraindications before vaccinating this fragile population [1], and then to keep the patient under observation for a minimum of 15 minutes after the injection to ensure that there were no early adverse effects, justified a very gradual implementation of the vaccination campaign. This extreme caution is assumed by the health authorities, who rule out the possibility of simplifying these procedures during the preliminary phase. It is sanctioned by a very slow start of the programme. The first results (less than 100 people vaccinated in 3 days) are difficult to defend in comparison with those of European countries that have followed different strategic plans. Adopted to reassure public opinion, which has been won over by hesitation [2], these excessive precautions may, on the other hand, give rise to a growing lack of understanding of a campaign that seems to have been launched with a lack of determination.

France has suffered more than 64,000 deaths from Covid-19, nearly a third of them in the high-risk population that needs to be vaccinated over the next eight weeks. In view of this, the national immunisation campaign against Covid-19 must be exemplary in a country that has contributed so much to the elimination of infectious diseases through vaccination.

In order not to jeopardize its success, **the National Academy of Medicine recommends:**

- to have full confidence in the independent expertise carried out by the European agency or the validation of vaccines put on the market;
- to simplify and shorten as much as possible the vaccination procedures in EHPADs and similar establishments [1];
- to ensure that first-phase vaccination interventions are a priority in departments with the highest Covid-19 incidence rates;

- to ensure full transparency on the status of available vaccine stocks so that the implementation of the vaccination strategy does not appear to be dictated by delivery contingencies;
- to restore confidence, which is essential to achieve the level of health coverage necessary to control the epidemic, through the quality of information and the value of example.

For its part, **the National Academy of Medicine** undertakes to organise a collective vaccination session for its full and corresponding members as soon as phase 2 of the national programme is completed, i.e. in March 2021.

1. Press release from the National Academy of Medicine "What consent to vaccination against Covid-19 for elderly people living in institutions? "December 24, 2020
2. Press release from the National Academy of Medicine "Vaccination against Covid-19, why hesitate? "December 14, 2020