A future vaccination campaign against COVID-19 at risk of vaccine hesitancy and politicisation

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A future vaccination campaign against COVID-19 at risk of vaccine hesitancy and politicisation

Just a few weeks ago, more than half of the world’s population was on lockdown to limit the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Scientists are racing against time to provide a proven treatment. Beyond the current outbreak, in the longer term, the development of vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 and their global access are a priority to end the pandemic. However, the success of this strategy relies on people’s acceptability of immunisation: what if people do not want the shot? This question is not rhetorical; many experts have warned against a worldwide decline in public trust in immunisation and the rise of vaccine hesitancy during the past decade, especially in whole Europe and in France. Early results from a survey done in late March in France suggests that this distrust is likely to become an issue when the vaccine will be made available.

We did an online survey in a representative sample of the French population aged 18 years and older 10 days after the nationwide lockdown was introduced (March 27–29). We found that 26% of respondents stated that, if a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 becomes available, they would not use it. It might come as a surprise given the situation a few weeks ago: the whole population was confined as the outbreak had not yet reached its peak, and media were flooded with daily death tolls and the saturation of intensive care wards. The social profile of reluctant responders is even more worrying: this attitude was more prevalent among low-income people (37%), who are generally more exposed to infectious diseases, among young women (aged 18–35 years; 36%), who play a crucial role in their attitude. Participants’ data also suggest that the political views of respondents play an important part in their attitude. Participants’ acceptance of a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 strongly

Figure: The French public’s intention to refuse vaccination against COVID-19 according to their vote at the first round of the 2017 presidential election, March 27–29, COCONEL Survey (n=1012)
Public authorities are setting up fast-track approval processes for a putative vaccine against SARS-CoV-2. It is crucial to communicate early and transparently on these processes to avoid vaccines becoming part of political debates.

We declare no competing interests.

The COCONEL Group

patrick.peretti-watel@inserm.fr

The COCONEL Group includes: Patrick Peretti-Watel (scientific coordinator), Valérie Seror, Sébastien Cortaredona, Odile Launay, Jocelyn Raude, Pierre Verger (research consortium), François Beck, Stéphane Legleye, Olivier L’Handidon, Jeremy Ward (steering committee)

Aix Marseille Université, IRD, AP-HP, SSA, VITRÔME, Marseille, France (PP-W, VS, JW), Southeastern Health Regional Observatory (ORS Paca). Marseille, France (PP-W, PV), Inserm CIC 1417, Université Paris, Faculté de Médecine Paris Descartes, AP-HP, Hôpital Cochin, Paris, France (OL’H); EHESP School of Public Health, Rennes, France (JR); CESP, Université Paris Sud, Faculté de Médecine UVSQ, Inserm, Université Paris-Saclay, Villejuif, France (FB, SL); Université Rennes, CNRS, CREM UMR 6211, Rennes, France (OLH); and GEMASS, CNRS, Université Paris Sorbonne, Paris, France (WW)


Global outbreak research: harmony not hegemony

To make clinical and biological observations within a timeframe that is likely to benefit patients during disease outbreaks, coordination of global research must match the speed of spread of novel pathogens. Time is short. Circumstances call for international collaboration to understand, treat, and prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

During previous infectious disease outbreaks, clinical research has often been established on an ad-hoc basis and done in silos, using different methodologies and designs. This approach limits opportunities to compare results, or to combine smaller studies to obtain answers quickly. Thus, perhaps it is self-evident that harmonisation of clinical investigation during