



Vaccinate medical staff to ensure an effective campaign against COVID-19

7 January 2021

The Board of the Federation of the European Academies of Medicine (FEAM) calls for the inclusion of health workers as a priority target group for COVID-19 vaccines

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause illness, death, and the saturation of healthcare systems, forcing European countries to adopt strict measures to prevent next waves, the launch of a vaccination campaign throughout Europe following the authorisations granted by the European Medicine Agency (EMA) to the Pfizer-BioNTech¹ and Moderna² vaccines is bringing new hope.

The FEAM Board acknowledges the essential role played by the EU Commission in securing the purchase of massive doses of vaccines (almost 2 billion) for all EU citizens³. As delays in production and distribution of vaccines threaten the pace and scope of vaccination in the next months, we also welcome the EU Commission's ongoing efforts to further negotiate with manufacturers as well as the allocation of additional resources to boost production capacities⁴.

It is now imperative to pay attention to the prioritisation, adequacy and speed of COVID-19 vaccination across Europe. Given the limited quantities of available vaccines, prioritisation is key for the success of vaccination. As highlighted by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC): "the process of prioritising which groups to vaccinate in the initial phase needs to be fair, transparent and continuously updated, based on new available knowledge"⁵.

Therefore, the FEAM Board strongly supports high priority vaccination of health personnel and support staff providing direct and daily care for COVID-19 patients during the earliest phases of vaccination. As health personnel and support staff can transmit the disease to patients and fragile individuals while being asymptomatic, we also support the vaccination of all health personnel and support staff as soon as possible. As highlighted by an open letter to the Belgian Health Minister Franck Vandenbroucke signed by Fellows of the Belgian Royal Academy of Medicine (ARMB), which is a Member of FEAM⁶, first-line medical staff should not be left out of the priority groups for vaccination.

Health workers are being included in the vaccination campaigns of many countries and this is also in line with the recommendation by the World Health Organization to target health workers and vulnerable groups during

¹ [EMA recommends first COVID-19 vaccine for authorisation in the EU](#), EMA Press release issued on 21 December 2020.

² <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-recommends-covid-19-vaccine-moderna-authorisation-eu>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans_en

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/public-health/coronavirus-vaccines-strategy_en

⁵ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19-vaccination-and-prioritisation-strategies.pdf>

⁶ [Vacciner sans délai les soignants contre la Covid-19: une priorité absolue](#), Open Letter to Mr Franck Vandenbroucke, Belgian Health Minister written by Belgian Medics, 5 January 2021

the first phase of COVID-19 vaccination⁷. Vaccinating health personnel is also the only way to ensure the continuity of healthcare for patients with COVID-19 and those with other pathologies at times of scarcity of personnel due to increased pressure in health systems and high rates of SARS CoV2 infection among health workers. Therefore, these health workers should be vaccinated at the same time as fragile and at-risk populations as well as health workers of retirement homes. For the latter, vaccination of residents and staff is of extreme importance. In addition to these benefits, if vaccines protect against infection, and therefore against further transmission, vaccinating health workers will lead to further indirect benefits by protecting hospitalised patients or individuals living in long-term care home facilities, as well as those that cannot be vaccinated due to health-related conditions⁸.

To ensure a successful rollout, national authorities should also guarantee a brisk pace of vaccination. As underlined by the French National Academy of Medicine⁹, it is imperative that vaccination is implemented safely as well as promptly.

⁷ [Guidance on developing a national deployment and vaccination plan for COVID-10 vaccines](#), World Health Organisation, 16 November 2020 (page 20). Those recommendations are based on [WHO SAGE values framework for the allocation and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination](#) issued on 14 September 2020 which identify health workers as of high value to be considered as a priority group for COVID-19 vaccination.

⁸ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19-vaccination-and-prioritisation-strategies.pdf>

⁹ [Vaccination anti-Covid : il n'est plus temps d'attendre](#), Statement of the French National Medicine Academy, 31 December 2020.

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Rue d'Egmont, 13 | B-1000 Brussels | +32 (0)2 793 02 50 | info@feam.eu | [@FedEuroAcadMed](https://twitter.com/FedEuroAcadMed) | www.feam.eu