Questions and answers regarding vaccination against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus

1. Why should I have a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus?

Vaccines are manufactured with the purpose to be used against diseases which cannot be controlled only by applying other public health measures. Their purpose is to restrict and wipe out highly contagious diseases with serious implications for people's health, high mortality, serious implications for the health systems, but also serious economic effects on society.

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is a new virus which a year after its appearance, has dramatically affected all people's lives globally. It is highly contagious and cannot therefore be controlled only by applying other public health measures, more familiar to all of us. It severely impacts patients' health in many cases, can result in high human life loss even for healthy individuals, affects seriously the daily lives of all of us, challenges health systems and causes irreparable financial implications all over the planet.

2. How effective is the vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus?

At present, there are many vaccines for SARS-CoV-2 undergoing clinical trials. How effective a vaccine is, always depends on the specific vaccine, the correct method of vaccination and on factors regarding the immune response of each individual. The first vaccines submitted for approval appear to be quite effective, up to 95%. The responsible supervisory bodies approving the distribution of vaccines prioritize vaccine effectiveness and safety.

3. Is it possible that I have the vaccine and still become ill with COVID-19?

No vaccine is 100% effective. This means that in some cases a person may become ill with the new coronavirus, although they were vaccinated. Citizens will therefore have to continue taking the precautions suggested for the avoidance of infection, i. e. vaccinated persons must continue using a mask, keep social distancing, regular and meticulous hand washing and cleaning of the areas where they work or live. The vaccines against COVID-19 disease appear to reduce the possibility of a person becoming ill with the disease. Each vaccine has undergone clinical trials in various countries and has an acceptable safety profile. Already, more than 65.000.000 doses have been administered in 56 countries globally. A few weeks are needed for a person to develop immunity and be protected after vaccine administration. Some people may become ill with COVID-19 although they were vaccinated, but the infection may be less serious.

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4. Is it possible that I become ill with SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus because of the vaccine?

None of the vaccines under study and approval for SARS-CoV-2 virus contains the whole virus. Most vaccines used now in medicine contain only part of the viruses which are capable of resulting in the production of protective antibodies against the virus in the person they are administered to. In this way, the person who is vaccinated does not in any way risk getting ill with the coronavirus because of the vaccine.

There is however the possibility that they have already contracted the COVID-19 disease and not be aware of it, if symptoms appear only after vaccination. Although a mild fever may appear within one or two days from vaccination, if one presents other COVID-19 disease symptoms (such as a new continuous coughing, high fever or fever that lasts longer, anosmia, loss of taste) they must stay at home and plan to have a laboratory check.

5. Are vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus safe? Do they have undesirable effects? Which are they?

Like all known vaccines, the new vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 virus may have undesired effects. Most are mild and short-term and do not appear in all people. Such undesired effects are pain and sensitivity in the hand where the vaccine was administered, tending to worsen for about 1-2 days after the vaccine, a sense of fatigue, headache, general aches or mild flu-like symptoms. Although fever is not rare for two to three days, high temperature is unusual and may indicate COVID-19 disease or another infection. An unusual side effect is lymphadenopathy. Rest and taking a normal dose of paracetamol help a person feel better. Symptoms from side effects usually last for less than a week. Mild symptoms after the first dose are no counter-indication for vaccination with the second dose, required for better protection against the virus. If symptoms become worse or there is worry, it is good to inform the attending physician for a correct evaluation. Undesired vaccine side effects are declared with the help of the Yellow Card system which may be found online (https://www.eof.gr/web/guest/yellowgeneral).

6. How much does the vaccination for the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus cost?

The vaccination is a very important public health measure. The distribution of vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus in Greece will be free of charge.

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7. How will I be able to get a vaccine, if I wish to?

The Ministry of Health, through the mass media and its web page (https://www.moh.gov.gr/), constantly informs citizens about the newer developments regarding the way vaccination will be carried out. According to the National Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 (https://covid19.gov.gr/ethniko-schedio-emvoliastikis-kalypsis-gia-covid-19/) citizens will be able to participate in vaccination through e-prescription or for those not registered in e-prescription, through an on-line platform (https://emvolio.gov.gr/). For this purpose, a special call center will operate.

8. After vaccination will I have to apply the protective measures against the coronavirus?

The new vaccines for the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus are no substitute for the other public health measures at this stage of the pandemic. Firstly, the vaccination of a large part of the population requires time. Also, we must see which percentage of the population will eventually get the vaccine and learn even more about the way the new coronavirus is transmitted. It is still unknown which percentage of the population must be vaccinated with the new vaccines in order to achieve herd immunity, in other words we do not know how many persons must have been ill and have been vaccinated in total for the new coronavirus not to be transmitted. In addition, more data are required regarding the effectiveness of the new vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 in reducing the risk of transmission of the virus until the competent authorities lift the remaining public health protection measures against the new, particularly transmitted virus. According to available data, the first vaccine dose does not ascertain the required protection. That is why vaccinated persons will have to continue using a mask, keeping social distancing, regular and meticulous hand hygiene and cleaning the space where they live or work. The opposite practice may lead to a new outbreak of cases, an undesirable event as humanity has already been severely affected by this pandemic.

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