

# France plans coronavirus vaccination drive from April

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France aims to launch a major COVID-19 vaccination campaign between April and June next year, President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday.

Early 2021 will see a first vaccination drive targeted at the most fragile and exposed groups, followed by a second campaign for the rest of the population, Macron told a press briefing at the Elysée Palace in Paris.

Prime Minister Jean Castex, addressing parliament, added that residents of retirement homes—where 16,000 people out of a national total of more than 52,000 have died from COVID—and some staff would have priority for vaccinations.

Worldwide hopes that COVID shots could be ready for use by the end of this year received a boost when US firm Moderna said it was filing Monday for emergency authorisation of its vaccine in the United States and Europe.

Another vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech has also been submitted for approval on both sides of the Atlantic in recent days, with both inoculations claiming around 95 percent effectiveness.

Pfizer/BioNTech has predicted their vaccine could be greenlit in the US shortly after December 10,

while Europe's medicines regulator said Tuesday that it would decide by December 29 whether to grant them emergency approval, ahead of Moderna's treatment.

Macron said the likely limited availability of vaccines by the end of December or early January meant mass vaccinations would have to wait.

Difficult storage conditions for first-generation vaccines also made a widespread rollout impractical, he said.

Priority would be given first to people over 75 and health workers, then to everyone over 50, and then to people with jobs exposed to high infection risks or living in precarious social conditions.

The government faces a tough task in convincing an increasingly vaccine-sceptic nation of the merits of having the jab.

A poll published in Le Journal du Dimanche newspaper at the weekend showed only 41 percent of the French planned to get vaccinated.

Macron reiterated his promise that shots would not be mandatory, saying France would adopt "a strategy of persuasion and transparency".

French health authorities said Monday the virus death toll had reached 52,731.

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