



European lung health collaboration calls for frontline workers and lung disease patients to be prioritised in EU's COVID-19 vaccines roll out

21/12/2020 - COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the respiratory community. The newly formed European lung health collaboration welcomes the tremendous efforts made in the development of safe vaccines for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and celebrates the European Medicines Agency (EMA) approval of the first vaccine for COVID-19.

The announcement gives hope to many that a safe and effective tool in the fight against COVID-19 has been found. Now, we call on policymakers to prioritise frontline health workers and people of all ages living with a lung disease in the rolling-out of the vaccine.

People living with lung disease have been shielding for much of the year – unable to go to work or study, see family members or even visit the shops. Healthcare appointments have been postponed, suspended and in some cases, treatments interrupted. Many have been living in strict isolation, relying on forthcoming vaccines to be able to continue with their lives.

Respiratory healthcare workers have also worked tirelessly on the frontline throughout the pandemic putting their lives at risk to save others, whilst the respiratory scientific community has worked at speed to unravel the complexities of this virus and the disease it causes.

On this historic and important day, as a respiratory community, we are calling on policymakers, national governments and the public to ensure that:

- All frontline workers and people of all ages living with lung conditions are prioritised in national vaccine roll-out plans.
- COVID-19 vaccines and the logistics surrounding distribution and delivery to patients are made as clear, accessible, and efficient as possible at the national level, and that patients know who to address questions to.
- Vaccines are given safely, ensuring the vaccination process does not put people living with lung conditions at risk of catching COVID-19.
- All efforts are made to ensure that the public has confidence in vaccines authorised by EMA and the way that they are administered, so that vaccine uptake is high.

The respiratory community is ready to disseminate information on vaccination to citizens, health professionals and patients in the upcoming months. Through European and local networks, we will help to reach the people who need to be informed.

Statement from Isabel Saraiva, a patient living with chronic lung disease who has not left the house since February 2020:

“As a chronic respiratory patient who has been shielding since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic early in 2020, I am delighted to hear that a vaccine is now available and has been approved in record

time. So many of us are dreaming of the day when we can once again leave the house safely, return to our lives, work and studies, and hug our families and friends. We call on everyone to get the vaccine so that we protect each other, and to support the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines so that we can all breathe freely again in 2021.”

Statement from Professor Anita Simonds, President of the European Respiratory Society (ERS):

“We fully support the development of safe and effective vaccines that can prevent and protect against SARS-CoV-2. Vaccines will play a very important role in controlling this virus alongside measures that are currently recommended to slow the spread, such as frequent hand washing, wearing a face covering and physical distancing.”

The European lung health collaboration is driven by European-level patient groups and healthcare professionals, working together to increase awareness of lung health and prevention of respiratory disease by 2030, improve lung healthcare and research, and tackle COVID-19 and its long-term impacts in Europe.

Contact

Beth Maguire
European Respiratory Society Communications Coordinator
E: beth.maguire@ersnet.org