

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri



Abstract

**VACCINES AND COVID-19:
ETHICAL ASPECTS
ON RESEARCH, COST AND DISTRIBUTION**

27 November 2020

The Committee intends to propose a general ethical reflection on the issue of vaccines with particular reference to research, production and deployment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, starting from the awareness of the conditions of scientific and epidemiological uncertainty regarding the virus.

While taking note of the numerous trials in progress, the ICB highlights on the ethical level that the pandemic emergency should not lead to decreasing the duration of trial timeframes, which are indispensable on a scientific, bioethical and bio-legal level, in order to ensure quality and the protection of the participants.

The Committee believes that the vaccine should be considered a 'common good', whose production and deployment for the benefit of all countries of the world should not be regulated solely by market laws. This recommendation must not remain a mere hope, but rather it constitutes an obligation to be met by the International politics of States. The ICB also considers it essential for pharmaceutical companies to recognize their social responsibility in this serious pandemic.

The Committee draws attention to the indispensability of ethical reflection in the context of distribution choices. Given the uncertainties around vaccines the Committee believes that the criteria, including the ethical criteria, for identifying priority categories, can only be potentially general at this time, and will require further specification in the light of new scientific knowledge on the vaccine and the quantity of doses initially available; knowing that it will not be possible to provide for everyone at the same time. The Committee, however, as of now, emphasizes the importance of every choice which regards distribution to be based on the general moral, ethical and legal principle of the equal dignity of all human beings without any discrimination, as well as the integrative principle of equity, that pays special attention to vulnerability and specific needs.

The Committee believes that all efforts should be made to achieve and maintain optimal vaccination coverage, not excluding mandatory vaccination in the case of emergency, especially for professional groups more exposed to the infection and its transmission. The Committee hopes that this obligation will be lifted if there is no longer a major threat to society and by favoring and encouraging spontaneous adherence to vaccination by the population. An essential condition so that the vaccine distribution plan may be ensued by an acceptance of vaccination by citizens, is the provision of information and communication that is transparent, clear, understandable, consistent and coherent, and based on up to date scientific data. Specific attention should be paid to identifying the sources of disinformation and false information.

With regard to the equitable distribution of vaccines the Committee recommends a multidisciplinary discussion which includes ethical reflection geared towards the concrete situation.