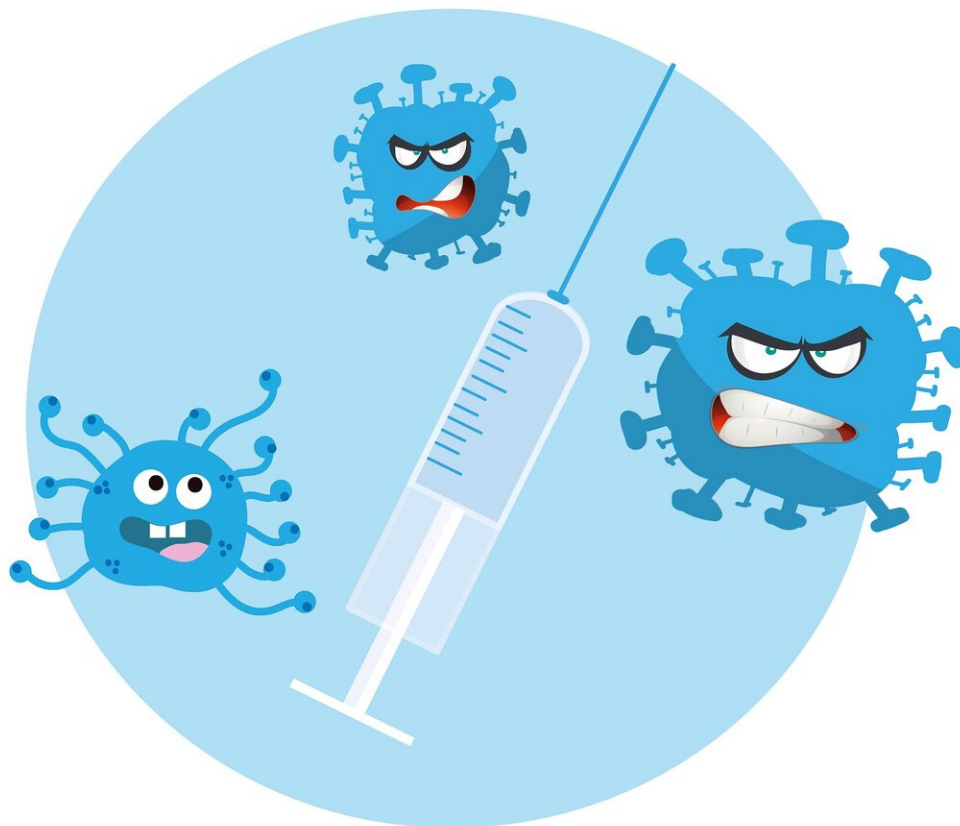


France to widen COVID vaccine drive to 12 to 18-year-olds from June 15

June 2 2021



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France will start offering COVID-19 vaccines to all young people aged 12-18 years starting on June 15, President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday.

During a visit to the village of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie in southern France, Macron also noted that 50 percent of French adults have now received at least one COVID vaccine jab, calling it "truly a turning point" in the country's inoculation drive.

Vaccine supplies have increased sharply recently, prompting officials to open up appointments to all adults earlier this week, several weeks ahead of schedule.

With the country just beginning to bounce back from a severe third wave of infections, Macron's government is keen to quickly expand the vaccine coverage to slow the spread of variants.

But Macron urged people to remain "extremely careful and vigilant" and said wearing face masks outdoors would still be required in several regions for the time being.

The 43-year-old president, who caught COVID last December, announced Monday that he and his wife had also had the jab.

Later Wednesday, Health Minister Olivier Veran told TF1 television that the vaccination programme for teenagers would not be compulsory, but on a voluntary basis and with the agreement of parents.

Starting the vaccinations for adolescents now would make it easier to avoid schools closures at the beginning of the next academic year in September, he added.

The country is emerging from its third nationwide lockdown, with

restaurants and cafes now allowed to serve clients outside. Indoor dining is due to resume from June 9.

Pressure on hospitals has eased, with the number of COVID patients in intensive care falling steadily in recent weeks, with 2,754 serious cases as of Wednesday, down from more than 6,000 in late April.

Macron was in Saint-Cirq-Lapopie to launch a nationwide tour ahead of next year's presidential election, as well as regional elections set for later this month.

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