

Germany eyes voluntary COVID-19 vaccine by mid-2021

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Germany aims to reach herd immunity through a voluntary coronavirus vaccine expected to be widely available by mid-2021, the health minister said Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters in Berlin, minister Jens Spahn said he wanted to stress there would be no mandatory requirement to get inoculated once a vaccine is ready, "despite what is sometimes said".

"We need 55 to 65 percent of the population to get vaccinated to reach what is known as herd immunity and I firmly believe we can achieve this voluntarily," he said.

Scientists around the world are racing to produce a safe and efficient vaccine to halt a pandemic that has killed almost a million people.

As in other countries, German anti-vaccination campaigners and conspiracy theorists have railed any against any potential COVID-19 vaccine, at times taking part in large street protests.

Surveys however suggest the majority of Germans are willing to get vaccinated.

Speaking at the same press conference, Research Minister Anja Karliczek said Germany only expects a vaccine to be available "to wide sections of the population" by the middle of 2021.

The estimate is in line with a recent assessment from the World Health Organization.

US President Donald Trump however has hinted a vaccine could be rolled out before November's elections, while Russia has already approved one despite not completing [clinical trials](#).

Funding boost

Karliczek insisted Germany and the European Union would not be taking "risky shortcuts" in the battle to develop a safe and efficient vaccine.

She said the German government was offering around 750 million euros (\$890 million) in funding to help three domestic firms with their vaccine research and development.

The two most advanced with their vaccine work, Germany's BioNTech, which is teaming up with US giant Pfizer, and CureVac, will receive 375 million and 230 million euros respectively.

Talks with the third company, IDT Biologika, are in the final stages.

As part of the agreement, the company that ends up developing a working vaccine will reserve 40 million doses for Germany.

Germany has already secured 54 million doses through an EU-wide contract with AstraZeneca, and further contracts are being negotiated.

Once a [vaccine](#) has received the necessary regulatory approval, Spahn said he expected the rollout to be a matter of "days or a very few weeks".

He warned that not everyone would have access to a job from day one, saying logistical challenges meant priority would have to be given to certain groups like the elderly and those in frontline jobs.

Germany has had more success than neighbouring countries in suppressing the virus, partly thanks to mass testing and rigorous contact tracing.

But numbers have been climbing again in recent weeks, with the country adding 1,407 new cases on Tuesday.

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