

## French people's opinions on vaccines in winter 2023

This note, written by Amandine Gagneux-Brunon, Elisabeth Botelho-Nevers, Patrick Peretti-Watel, Pierre Verger and Jeremy Ward, presents the preliminary results of the second survey from the ICOVAC project (funded by : ANRS-Emerging Infectious Diseases, dir. P. Peretti-Watel and Jeremy Ward). The survey was conducted by the Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur Regional Health Observatory. The questionnaire was designed by the authors. Data collection, analysis and the production of this report benefited from the support of Cyril Bérenger (Database Manager, ORS PACA), Sébastien Cortaredona (Statistician, AMU, IRD), Gwenaëlle Maradan (Survey platform manager, ORS PACA) and Bilel Mebarki (Graphic designer, ORS PACA).

The ICOVAC Wave 2 survey was conducted between 24 November and 21 December 2023, among a sample of 2,169 people, representative of the adult population living in mainland France by age, gender, socio-professional category and region of residence (quota method).

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### Main Results

- In France, since September 2023, HPV vaccination has been organized in junior high schools. This measure was approved by 70% of French respondents, 19% were against and 11% had no opinion.
- More generally, regarding the organization of vaccination campaigns in schools, the proportion of favourable opinions reached 74% (16% disapproved and 10% did not answer).
- With regard to the bivalent influenza/Covid-19 vaccine, 42% of respondents approved it, 48% were against, and 10% had no opinion. Two-thirds of those opposed or undecided said they feared such a vaccine would be less well tolerated.
- As for vaccination against the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), the vaccine for pregnant women to protect babies is supported by 64% of French people, while that for adults at risk (elderly or immunocompromised) is supported by 61%. These new vaccines suffer from the lack of awareness of RSV and the infections it causes.
- Finally, attitudes towards vaccines in general, and measles, flu, hepatitis B and HPV vaccines in particular, remain stable or are improving.

## Summary

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Main Results .....	1
HPV vaccination organized in junior high schools since September .....	3
School vaccination campaigns .....	4
The bivalent vaccine for influenza and Covid-19 .....	4
Vaccination against the RSV. ....	5
Monitoring opinions on vaccines .....	7
The ICOVAC project .....	8

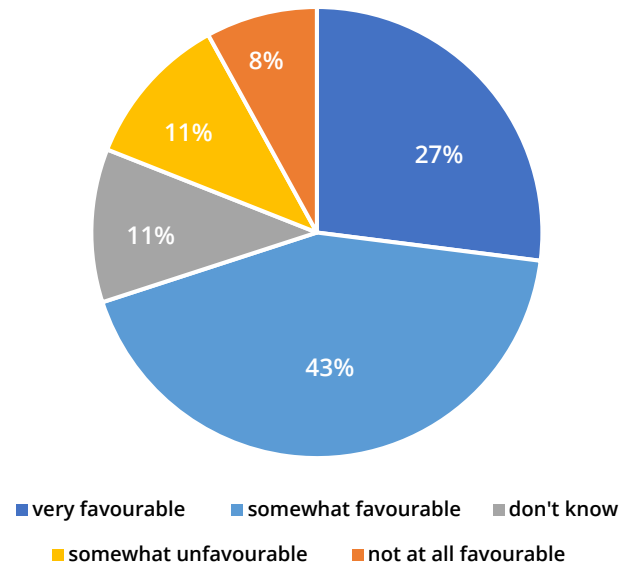
## HPV vaccination organized in junior high schools since September

In France, at the end of 2022, vaccination coverage against human papillomaviruses (HPV) was estimated at 47.8% for girls and 12.8% for boys born in 2007 for the first dose, far from the 80% target set to eliminate HPV-induced cancers, and also far from vaccination coverage in other European countries such as the United Kingdom and Portugal<sup>1</sup>. In the UK, vaccination has been offered in schools since 2008 for girls and 2019 for boys. On February 28, 2023, President Macron announced the introduction of an HPV vaccination program in junior high schools: HPV vaccination should now be offered free of charge to all 5th graders from the start of the 2023-2024 school year.

In December 2023, 27% and 43% of respondents respectively declared themselves very favourable and somewhat favourable to the HPV vaccination campaign organized in junior high schools since September, i.e. 70% favourable opinions, versus 19% unfavourable opinions, while 11% had no opinion (see Figure 1).

Men were slightly more likely than women to approve the HPV vaccination campaign in junior high schools (73% vs. 68%), and adults without children were more likely to refrain from answering (12% vs. 6% of those with children). This opinion did not vary according to age, except that people aged 18-34 were more often “very favourable” to this measure. Participants’ educational level was associated with opinion on HPV vaccination in junior high schools: 67% of respondents with a level of education lower than or equal to the baccalaureate said approved it, compared with 74% of respondents with a higher education level. This opinion varied little according to socio-professional category, although there was a ten-point gap between executives (73% in favour) and blue-collar workers (60%). Support for this measure was positively correlated with trust in the various players involved in vaccination (government, scientists, doctors, government agencies managing health and environmental risks, pharmaceutical industry). For example, among those who said they trusted government agencies, 83% supported HPV vaccination in junior high schools, compared with

**Figure 1. Opinions towards HPV vaccination campaigns in junior high schools (ICOVAC, wave 2, December 2023, N=2,169).**



60% of those who did not. Finally, among those who approved HPV vaccination, 87% supported the measure.

<sup>1</sup> Nguyen-Huu NH, Thilly N, Derrough T, Sdona E, Claudot F, Pulcini C, Agrinier N. Human papillomavirus vaccination coverage, policies, and practical implementation across Europe. *Vaccine*. 2020 Feb 5;38(6):1315–31.

## School vaccination campaigns

More generally, 43% and 31% of respondents respectively said they were very favourable and somewhat favourable of vaccination campaigns in schools (schools, middle schools, high schools), with 74% in favour, versus 16% who disapproved and 10% with no response (see Figure 2).

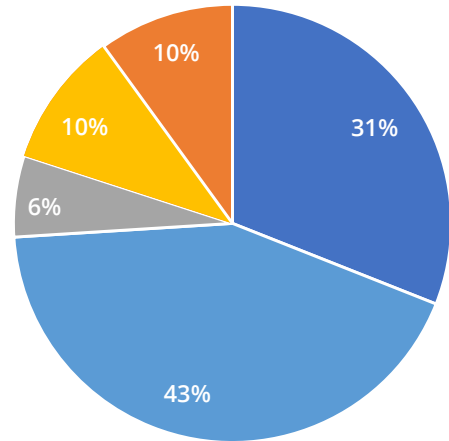
For this opinion, as for the previous one, men were slightly more likely than women to say they approved it (77% versus 71%), as were executives (75% versus 64% of blue-collar workers), and higher education graduates (78% versus 71% of respondents with a lower education level). Here again, favourable opinions are positively correlated with trust in the various stakeholders involved in vaccination. For example, among respondents who trusted doctors, 79% were in favour of vaccination campaigns in schools, compared with only 51% among those who didn't trust doctors.

## The bivalent vaccine for influenza and Covid-19

In December 2023, when asked “How favourable are you to the administration of a vaccine combining seasonal influenza and Covid-19, in a single injection?”, 42% of respondents were favourable, 48% were unfavourable, and 10% had no opinion (see Figure 3). Men were more likely to approve such a vaccine (52% of them, versus only 33% of women), as were executives (56%, versus 33% of employees and 36% of blue-collar workers). Figure 3 details the results by age and gender: over the age of 65, at which flu vaccination is recommended and free of charge, hardly half of men and a minority of women approved this bivalent vaccine.

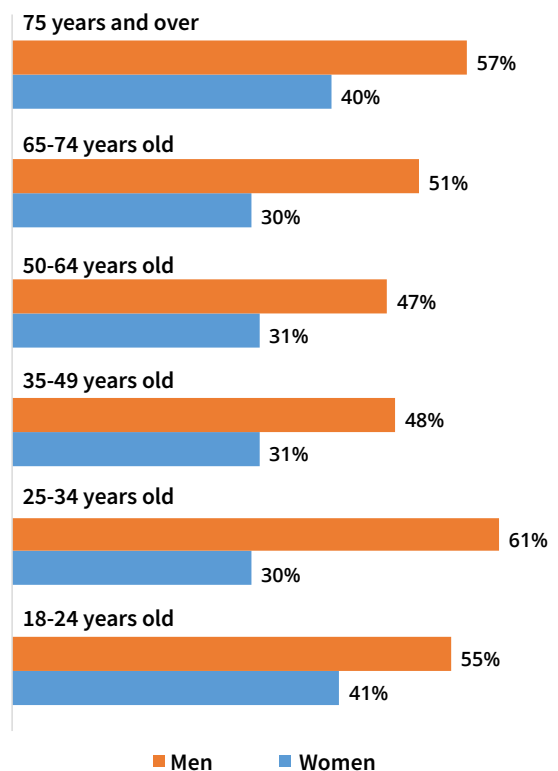
Regarding the reason for their decision, two-thirds (65%, or 37% of the total sample) of the respondents who were against or undecided about the bivalent vaccine said they feared that such a vaccine would be less well tolerated. This reason was given more frequently by higher education graduates, as well as by people aged 65 or over. As for the other reasons given, 44% of those who were against or undecided mentioned the fact that they didn't feel concerned by such a vaccine (this was more often the case for people aged 25-49), and 32% that they had never heard of the possibility (this was more often the case for people aged 18-24).

**Figure 2. Opinions toward the organisation of school vaccination campaigns (ICOVAC, wave 2, December 2023, N=2,169).**



■ very favourable ■ somewhat favourable ■ don't know  
■ somewhat unfavourable ■ not at all favourable

**Figure 3. Opinions toward a bivalent vaccine for influenza and covid-19, by age and gender (ICOVAC, wave 2, December 2023, N=2,169).**



## Vaccination against the RSV.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is responsible for bronchiolitis in infants, as well as respiratory infections in older adults and those with immunodepression. In autumn 2023, a passive immunization campaign was launched in France to protect infants using a monoclonal antibody, Nirsevimab<sup>2</sup>. Many infants received this treatment in the maternity hospital during the winter season, but only 13% of eligible children received it in ambulatory medicine. A number of vaccines have recently been authorized in Europe, aimed at adults at risk as well as pregnant women, with the aim of preventing infections in infants.

In December 2023, 22% of French people had “not at all” heard of RSV, 18% “not really”, 40% “vaguely” and 20% “definitely”. Similarly, three quarters were unaware that this virus causes respiratory infections in adults, one in five knew vaguely, and less than one in ten said they knew “definitely” (see Figure 4). Women were more likely to say they had heard of RSV (25% of women, versus 15% of men), as were people aged 65 and over (28%, versus 11% of 18-24 year-olds), with little variation according to respondents' level of education.

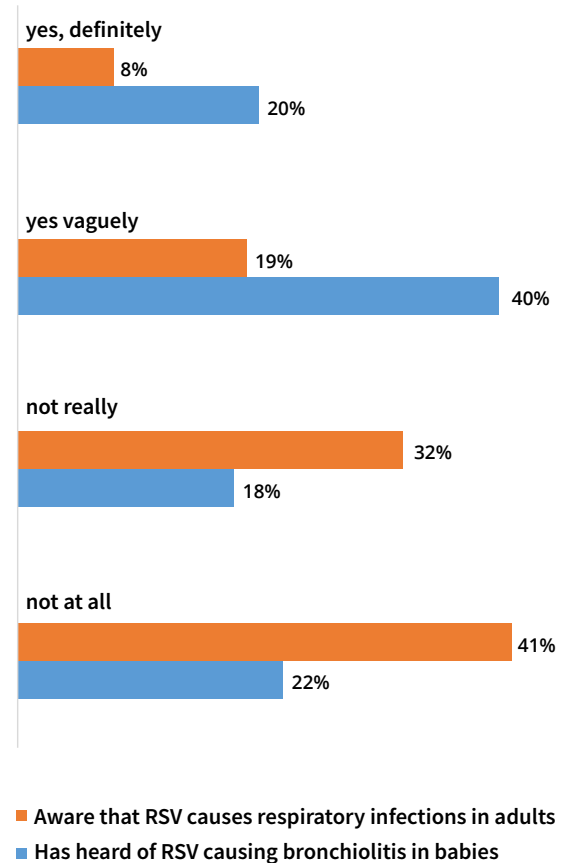
One in three French people (34%) said they were worried that they or someone close to them might catch the virus and contract these diseases. These respondents were then asked to specify for whom they were worried, with several possible answers: among them, 62% were worried for themselves, 41% for an adult over 65, 36% for a baby, 34% for an adult with heart or respiratory problems, 29% for an adult with a weak immune system, and 19% for a pregnant woman. Concern for oneself was more common among those aged 65 and over.

The RSV vaccine soon to be available to pregnant women, designed to protect babies with antibodies passed on by the mother, was supported by two-thirds of participants (64%: 45% “somewhat favourable”, 19% “very favourable”), while 18% had no opinion, and 18% disapproved (see Figure 5). This proportion reached 72% among men, against only 57% of women. Parents of children under the age of 5, and even more so of infants, were no more

<sup>2</sup> *Recommandation vaccinale contre les infections à VRS chez les femmes enceintes*, HAS, 2024 ([https://www.has-sante.fr/plugin/ModuleXitiKLEE/types/FileDocument/doXiti.jsp?id=p\\_3505337](https://www.has-sante.fr/plugin/ModuleXitiKLEE/types/FileDocument/doXiti.jsp?id=p_3505337)).

Passive immunization involves the direct administration of antibodies against a specific infectious organism, for example to prevent a disease in an unvaccinated subject. It is only effective for a few weeks.

**Figure 4. Respiratory syncytial virus knowledge, IVOVAC, wave 2, December 2023, N=2,169).**

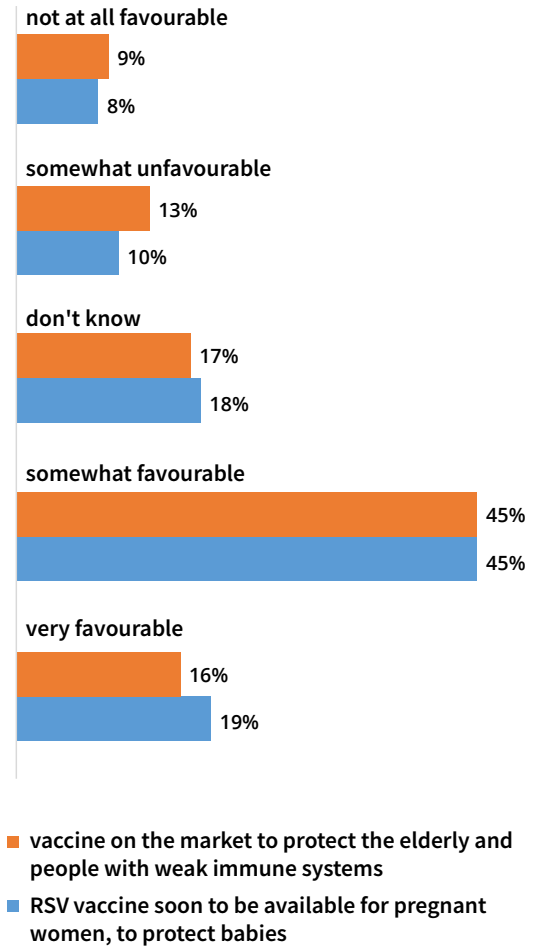


in favour of RSV vaccination for pregnant women than those without young children in their care. Respondents who said they were aware that RSV causes infections in adults were more likely to be in favour of RSV vaccination of pregnant women (82% of those who had “definitely” heard of it were in favour, versus 59% of those who had “not at all” heard of it). Finally, a favourable opinion of vaccination in general, and confidence in the pharmaceutical industry and science were associated with a favourable opinion of this vaccination.

With regard to the RSV vaccine already available on the market to protect the elderly and people with weak immune systems, respondents were asked whether they would be in favour of it if it were recommended in France (the review of this recommendation by the French Vaccine Committee is scheduled for June 2024): 61% of respondents supported this vaccination, 17% were undecided and 22% opposed it (see Figure 5). Here again, only 54% of women were in favour, versus 69% of men. What's more, older people, who are primarily concerned, were not more likely to support this vaccination. Among respondents who indicated that they were "definitely aware" that RSV can cause respiratory infections in adults, 70% supported the vaccination, versus 56% of those who answered "not at all". Similarly, as with RSV vaccination of pregnant women, those most in favour of RSV vaccination of adults had a favourable opinion of vaccination in general, were more frequently aware of RSV infections in adults, and had greater trust in science and the pharmaceutical industry.

In December 2023, the majority of French people supported RSV vaccination, whether for pregnant women or adults at risk. However, few French people were aware of the burden of RSV infections, which seems to have an impact on opinions about this vaccination. Women were less likely to support both vaccination for pregnant women and vaccination for adult at risk. Particular attention needs to be paid to this population before vaccinating pregnant women.

**Figure 5. Opinions on RSV vaccination (ICOVAC, wave 2, December 2023, N=2,169).**

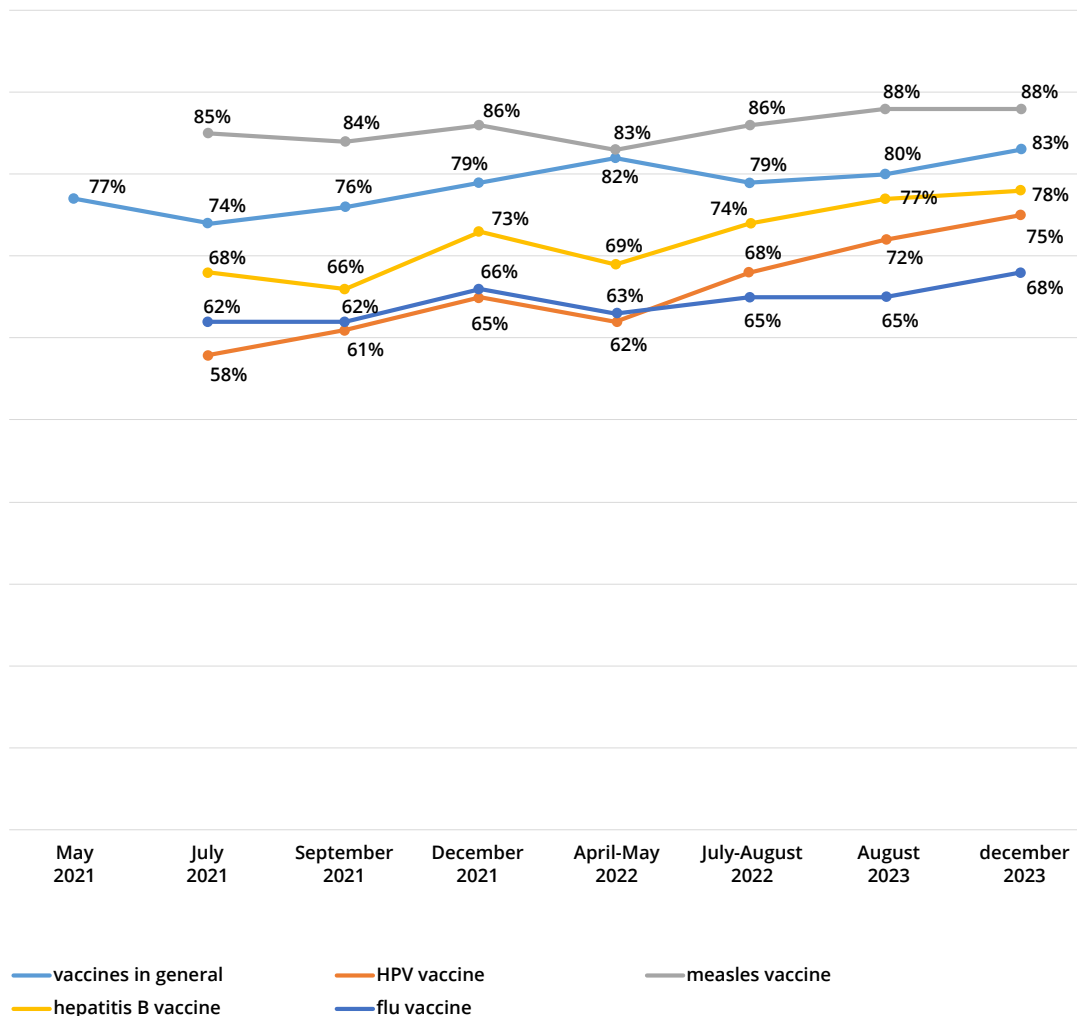


## Monitoring opinions on vaccines.

Since 2021, we have coordinated eight surveys containing the same series of questions on vaccines and carried out using the same methodology (Covireivac, Slavaco and Icovac surveys, 2000 to 4000 respondents per wave). In each survey, we asked respondents whether they were in favour of

vaccines in general, and measles, influenza, hepatitis B and HPV vaccines in particular. Figure 6 shows the trend in responses to these questions. “somewhat favourable” and “very favourable” responses have been aggregated. Over this period, opinions expressed are stable (for vaccines in general and measles) or increasing (little for the flu vaccine, more clearly for hepatitis B and especially HPV vaccines).

**Figure 6. Favourable opinions toward vaccines in general and specific vaccines (COVIREIVAC, SLAVACO & ICOVAC surveys, May 2021-December 2023, N=21, 167).**



## The ICOVAC project

The ICOVAC project (Impact of COVID-19 on vaccination in France, ANRS 0344 ICOVAC-France / CAPNET) pursues two main objectives: continue to monitor and document vaccine issues in the coming years around Covid-19; study the impact of this crisis on the debates, attitudes and behaviours towards vaccination in general and other existing or future vaccines. This project is deployed along four axes. The first axis reinvestigates contemporary vaccine issues by general population. The second is devoted to collective mobilizations and to public debates around these issues, while the third focuses on health professionals. Finally, the fourth axis brings together the actions which aim to structure research in Human and Social Sciences (SHS) on vaccine issues: the creation and management of the shs&vaccination network are part of this axis.

This project has been labeled a National Research Priority by the ad hoc national steering committee for therapeutic trials and other research on COVID-19 (CAPNET).

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### Contact Us

jeremy.ward@inserm.fr  
patrick.peretti-watel@inserm.fr  
pierre.verger@inserm.fr



## ICOVAC Wave 2 survey

# French people's opinions on vaccines in winter 2023

ORS PACA - April 2024  
Faculté des Sciences Médicales et Paramédicales  
27 Boulevard Jean Moulin,  
13385 Marseille Cedex 5

Tel. 04 91 32 48 00 | Email : [accueil@orspaca.org](mailto:accueil@orspaca.org)

[www.orspaca.org](http://www.orspaca.org)