



## EFN Policy Statement on Nursing Workforce Getting Vaccinated for COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic has caused significant infection and death among health care workers (HCW) throughout the world. It also will leave significant residue particularly for HCW experiencing physical, neurological, and mental health long-term after-effects.

Staffing levels and shortages of nursing experienced and reported on pre-pandemic will undoubtedly be negatively affected as a result of retention and recruitment difficulties post pandemic. There are immediate issues that must apply as per WHO Recommendation 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021: *"As long as vaccine supplies are very limited (stage 1 in the WHO Prioritization Roadmap), in settings with community transmission, the road map recommends that priority be given initially to health workers at high risk and older people with or without comorbidities. Protecting high risk health workers has a threefold purpose (i) to protect the individual health workers; (ii) to protect critical essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (iii) to prevent onward transmission to vulnerable people".*

The European Commission is adapting its regulatory framework to accelerate the development, authorisation and availability of vaccines while maintaining the standards for vaccine quality, safety, and efficacy.

In addition to that, once new vaccines are developed, the speed at which they can be produced and made available for citizens is unlikely to meet demands. Anticipating the expected worldwide competition to purchase them, and as of October 2020, the European Commission has signed COVID-19 vaccines purchase contracts with some production companies and explores the possibility of buying or even producing in Europe vaccines from other companies.

The frontline nurses, represented by the EFN through its Members, are the largest and most exposed healthcare professionals due to their frontline direct-patient-care services, which put the nurses in the most vulnerable and unsafe position.

Nurses are at the bedside of the patient, 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, from the information of infection rates this proximity to infected patients exposes them, and Health Care Assistant to higher risks of infection with COVID-19 than their peers in the healthcare sector. Therefore, the EFN, in the representation of 3 million EU nurses, asks the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers to:

- Make sure that the frontline nurses are the first group, across all EU Member States, for whom a COVID-19 vaccine is made available.
- The Biological Agent Directive (2000/54/EC) requires all protections available to be provided to workers during this pandemic. This includes vaccination and the requirement to prioritise the frontline health care workers most exposed for vaccination scheduling.
  - o Constant updates and revision of Personal Protection Equipment must also be undertaken as variants of the virus emerge and despite vaccination this protection must be constantly updated and available.
  - o In addition, staff who do not avail of vaccination, must be afforded all relevant information re: efficacy of vaccinations and encouraged but, not compelled to avail of same. Negative employment consequences cannot result from an informed decision to not avail of vaccination.
- Nurses must lead the vaccination programme inclusive of peer vaccination considering their expertise and training in this area.
- Provision of premium to private sector to administer vaccines must be discouraged, as profit from the pandemic cannot be tolerated when some nations will not have funds to secure widespread vaccination of people.
- Re-arrange already agreed budgets to inject funds into frontline nursing workforce, in the hospital sector, residential care and older person care sector and the community care.
- Positively and proactively engage media and social media against vaccination hesitance.
- Foster the co-creation and co-design with frontline nurses to enhance the political decision-making processes concerning vaccination uptake, protocols, education and evidence-based practise to support the effective and efficient implementation of EU vaccination policies.
- Work closely with the nursing profession to develop policies population health and protect nursing staff from unsafe and challenging working conditions, particularly when caring for COVID-19 patients.

## Further Readings

- EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0245&from=EN>
- European Commission. Press Release. 8 October 2020. "*Coronavirus: the Commission approves third contract to ensure access to a potential vaccine*".  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1829](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1829)
- EFN's Landing Page on the Coalition for Vaccination  
[http://www.efnweb.be/?page\\_id=12377](http://www.efnweb.be/?page_id=12377)

*Please contact Dr Paul De Raeve, Secretary General of the European Federation of Nurses Associations, for more information. Email: [efn@efn.be](mailto:efn@efn.be) – Tel: +32 2 512 74 19 – Web: [www.efnweb.eu](http://www.efnweb.eu)*

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