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Press information

EpiCOV: Population Immune Status Data to Guide Public Decision-Making

Quantifying the proportion of French citizens who have developed SARS-CoV-2 antibodies and documenting the effects of the epidemic on their living conditions appear as key factors in preparing the most appropriate deconfinement and prevention strategies, in enabling the early detection of any resurgence of the epidemic and, over the longer term, in monitoring the efficacy of the measures taken.

Driven by Inserm and the Directorate for Research, Studies, Assessment and Statistics (DREES) of France's Ministry of Solidarity and Health, in conjunction with their partners (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies [INSEE], Public Health Agency, National Center for Scientific Research [CNRS], National Institute for Demographic Studies [INED], Université Paris-Saclay), EpiCOV is a large-scale epidemiological study based on a major statistical survey. It is proposing global and scientifically reliable mapping of population immune status and dynamics across the French territory through the collection of biological samples paired with questionnaires.

The aims of EpiCOV are twofold: to provide precise mapping of the population's immune status, health, living conditions and the social inequalities relating to these three parameters, and to monitor the dynamics of the epidemic over the short, medium, and long term. The exceptionally rapid deployment of a large-scale epidemic surveillance cohort that is statistically representative at local level will in particular provide data used in modelling the epidemic.

The project will be based on a major national survey of a representative sample selected at random by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) of over 200,000 people aged 15 or over, resident throughout the territory (mainland France, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Reunion Island). They will be required to answer a 20 to 30-minute questionnaire (online or by telephone) with, in parallel, a consenting 100,000 of them mailing a small sample of their blood taken at home in order to determine whether they have come into contact with the virus. The responses will be treated in a confidential manner by the research teams, respecting current regulations (statistical confidentiality, French data protection authority [CNIL] regulations, and GDPR).

Results expected

With this project, it will be possible to elucidate the spatial, temporal, sociodemographic and familial aspects of the epidemic and of the confinement measures. It aims to describe the frequency of COVID-19 symptoms, supply data for models of population immunity evolution, provide estimations of the frequency of exposure to the virus, including the asymptomatic

forms of transmission, and evaluate changes in the health, wellbeing and behaviors of people living in France. Intended to be both precise and representative of the entire French population, it includes geographically and sociodemographically defined subgroups. All French departments (including certain overseas departments and regions [DROM]) will be included in the survey.

Schedule

The first wave of data collection will take place from April 30 to May 24, with a second wave to come in June. This operation may be repeated regularly to monitor the dynamic of the epidemic and the evolution of the country's health and social conditions, across all territories, age groups and major social groups.

Initial findings based on responses to the questionnaires should be available on a national scale at the end of May.

The first results of the biological samples will be provided as early as possible from the end of May, depending on the availability of qualified serological tests currently under development and the capacity of the test platforms.

Local authority participation

The local authorities will be fully involved in this initiative and mobilized to communicate its importance to their citizens, given that the validity of the study depends on their good participation. The local authorities will have access to the results that concern them directly.

A local authorities-researchers liaison committee will be established in order to present the study, discuss the initial findings and their consequences, and disseminate information concerning additional studies initiated on the territories.

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