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Letter to the Editor

The COVID-19 vaccine health pass fraud in France

David Zucman [1], Erwan Fourn [1], Alexandre Vallée [2,*]

[1] Internal Medicine, Foch Hospital, Suresnes, France
[2] Department of Epidemiology – Data – Biostatistics, Delegation of Clinical Research and Innovation, Foch Hospital, Suresnes, France

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In their study, Gagneux-Brunon et al. reported that in France 41.9% of French respondents were opposed to mandatory COVID-19 vaccination [1]. This study showed that young people were mainly opposed to mandatory vaccination compared to older people (>75 years old). Moreover, political affiliation/adherence may impact this attitude, with partisans of the far left and green parties more likely to be opposed to mandatory COVID-19 vaccine in comparison to partisans of the centre.

France is considered one of the most vaccine-sceptical countries and is known to be a "vaccine-hesitant" country [2]. When COVID-19 vaccination was launched in December 2020, the French government used a cautious communication stating that vaccination should not be mandatory. The early steps of COVID-19 vaccination showed a low uptake in the general population. The surge of the Delta variant led to the implementation of a health pass during the summer 2021. This health pass required that everyone aged 12 and older present a proof of vaccination or a negative test for SARS-CoV-2) to access a wide array of public spaces, including restaurants, bars, libraries, transportations, and hospitals. The health pass was mainly obtained in vaccination centres after entering the vaccination act on the social security server. This decision led to a kind of mandatory vaccination that was not fully assumed by the French authorities.

The introduction of the health pass markedly increased the number of people vaccinated against COVID-19. Based on the numeric vaccine certificates, the vaccine coverage is estimated at 90% of the eligible population in November 2021 and the French authorities self-congratulated on this result. But the major flaw of the health pass is the development of a massive fraud from the vaccine refusal population. This fraud has been encountered by every medical and paramedical employee in the vaccination centres. Every day in all the vaccination centres, personnel were asked to deliver false vaccination certificates in exchange for money. There has also been some wide range hacking of medical and paramedical identification cards that allowed thieves to obtain thousands of false vaccine certificates. The complete extent of the fraud is unknown, but police authorities recently assumed in 2022 at least 300 000 false certificates had been identified and led to prosecution [3]. Due to the multiplicity of the different means of fraud, it is possible that this figure represents only the tip of the iceberg of the health pass fraud.

Transparency declaration

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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* Corresponding author. A. Vallée, Department of Epidemiology – Data – Biostatistics, Delegation of Clinical Research and Innovation, Foch Hospital, Suresnes, 92151, France.
E-mail address: alexandre.g.vallee@gmail.com (A. Vallée).

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