



Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



Letter to the Editor

Money for a vaccine? Pay incentives as a solution to increase vaccination rates during the COVID-19 pandemic



The fight against coronavirus cannot be solved in one single country. This is a global problem. It can only be solved together and everywhere. Vaccination against COVID-19 is one of the most effective, affordable, and cost-effective ways to protect the population from COVID-19 disease and its complications. We propose a potential solution at the present time to increase the number of people vaccinated. Specifically, we report an example from Russia.

Mass vaccination in Russia started in December 2020, however, due to various circumstances; the authorities are constantly looking for new mechanisms to stimulate citizens to vaccinate.

By November 2021, only 33% of the population in Russia was vaccinated, according to the RBC (RosBiznesConsulting). The reason for this is the reluctance of the population to get vaccinated. The level of herd immunity is estimated by the authorities at 49%, but to stabilize the situation with the coronavirus, it should be 90–95%.¹

An urgent need was to educate citizens about the need for vaccination to overcome conservatism and fear of vaccination.

The authorities want to stimulate citizens by introducing mandatory QR codes for intercity transport, cafes, and non-food stores. One of the incentives is economic.

Thus, Moscow will continue to stimulate the vaccination of the population. The authorities plan to return to the practice of drawing valuable prizes among those who were vaccinated. This experience has already shown good results and aroused the interest of the population because not only cash prizes were raffled off but even apartments, as pointed out by the Mayor of Moscow.²

In Russia, the authorities concluded that the best way to encourage people to participate in the coronavirus vaccination is through financial incentives. The authorities decided to start by encouraging the elderly.

In older citizens, the disease can proceed with significant complications and lead to death. In Moscow, older citizens are encouraged to vaccinate. From October 12, Muscovites older than 65 years who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 will be able to choose in what form to receive an incentive—in the form of a gift set or a payment in the amount of 10 thousand rubles, in accordance with the order of the mayor of the city.

The program of financial incentives for the elderly to vaccinate began on 23 June. Gifts are awarded to those who will be vaccinated with the first component before December 31 and then fully complete the vaccination. Gift sets, which include medical devices and hygiene products, have already been given out to 240 thousand vaccinated pensioners.³ In the regions of Russia, measures are

also being taken, such as one-time cash payments after vaccinations to pensioners older than 60 years.

In addition, the Russian Ministry of Health proposes to stimulate the physicians involved in vaccination with cash payments. To maintain high rates of vaccination, as well as to motivate health workers to conduct outreach work among citizens, it is proposed to provide material incentives for health workers involved in the vaccination of the population as support measures.⁴

Current research does not provide a clear answer regarding the use of pay incentives to increase vaccination rates. Previous experimental research has shown that pay incentives do not always increase vaccination interest.⁵ However, it is critical to inquire as to the nature of the reward. In the experiment's case, the maximum reward was €200, it was in Germany, and it was not focused on pensioners.⁶ It is currently available in Moscow for 10,000 rubles, or about €120, which is a lower amount but significantly higher for Russian pensioners in relation to their pensions. The average pension in Russia is about €190,⁷ whereas in Germany it is about €900.³ Unfortunately, we do not yet have precise data on how many Moscow pensioners have been motivated to vaccinate as a result of the newly established financial incentive. All we know is that in the last two months, approximately 800,000 people in Moscow have been vaccinated for the first time.⁸ Unfortunately, no information on the age profile is available at this time.

Rewarding vaccination raises several ethical concerns, which were raised by many academics and experts when the scheme was first discussed and implemented in countries.⁹ Most of the world's economies were forced to go into lockdown for at least part of last year and this year, at a significant cost. Unfortunately, many countries are failing to achieve herd immunity, and solutions are being sought to address this issue. Some countries are even talking about and implementing mandatory vaccination, which is causing a lot of controversies because opponents of mandatory vaccination claim it restricts their freedom and rights.

We believe that focusing on rewarding the older population, which is the most affected by the COVID-19, with a significant one-time financial reward, such as one full month's worth of pension, will generate enough interest that many countries will achieve herd immunity and, as a result, the economy will save financial resources by implementing this measure. The lockdown cost countries a huge amount of resources and significantly increased the debt in many of them. Furthermore, retired people are frequently in a position where they do not have much money to spare, and the money invested in them will go back into the economy. We therefore eagerly await any credible data from Moscow on the success of the

financial incentive in this city, to assess whether offering a substantial sum for pensioners can avoid the next wave and return to normalcy in many countries. We believe that focusing only on pensioners with financial incentives is the right strategy to use in the countries where herd immunity has not yet been achieved.

References

1. Agapov V. *Low rates of vaccination will slow down the Russian economy*. November 19, 2021. <https://secretmag.ru/news/nizkie-tempy-vakcinacii-zatormozyat-ekonomiku-rossii-19-11-2021.htm> (in Russian).
2. Sergei Sobyanin: *programs to stimulate vaccination in Moscow will continue*. October 4, 2021. <https://www.mos.ru/mayor/themes/18299/7730050/> (in Russian).
3. *10 thousand instead of a gift: Moscow authorities continue to stimulate vaccinations*. October 13, 2021. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2625715> (in Russian).
4. *The Ministry of Health proposed to stimulate physicians involved in vaccination*. November 16, 2021. <https://ria.ru/20211116/minzdrav-1759370683.html> (in Russian).
5. Sprengholz P, Eitze S, Felgendreff L, Korn L, Betsch C. Money is not everything: Experimental evidence that payments do not increase willingness to be vaccinated against COVID-19. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2021;**47**(8):547–8. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-107122>.
6. Statista. Average gross monthly volume of retirement benefits per pensioner in Russia from 2012 and 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1093950/average-monthly-retirement-benefit-value-russia/>.
7. Ru-geld.de. Pension amount in Germany in 2021, 2020: average and minimum (social) pension, calculation of pensions, pension by profession. <https://ru-geld.de/en/pension/pension-amount.html>.
8. Gogov.ru. The number of people vaccinated against coronavirus in Moscow. <https://gogov.ru/covid-v-stats/msk#data> (in Russian).
9. Holt E. Serbia begins paying citizens to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. *Lancet* 2021;**397**(10287):1793. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)01097-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01097-7).

M. Haman*

*Department of Political Science, University of Hradec Králové,
Rokitanského 62, Hradec Králové, 500 03, Czech Republic*

A. Khakimova

*Institute of Information Systems and Engineering Computer
Technologies, Russian New University, Radio St. 22, 105005 Moscow,
Russia*

E-mail address: aida_khatif@mail.ru.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: michael.haman@uhk.cz (M. Haman).

2 January 2022

Available online 2 February 2022