

Disbelief and Denial in the West as Russia Produces First COVID Vaccine

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*‘Startling and confusing’ proclaimed Science magazine. ‘Reckless and foolish’ said US vaccine scientist **Peter Hotez**. ‘Dangerously rushed’ said the journal Nature. Western scientists are in denial. The first vaccine against the disease which has dominated all our lives for the last few months – Covid-19 – has been unveiled, not by a western nation, but by Russia.*

President Putin announced the registration of the vaccine, named ‘Sputnik V’, on Tuesday, and said that his own daughter had already tried the vaccine on herself, and found it to be safe and effective. Russia plans to begin rolling out the immunisation programme over the next coming weeks, offering it in the first place to medics on the front lines of the coronavirus epidemic, on a voluntary basis.

The [vaccine](#) underwent clinical trials in June and July, and is based on an existing formula on which many other contemporary vaccines have been produced. The Russian health ministry has said that experience of other similar vaccines has shown that they can provide immunity for up to two years. The head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, Kirill Dmitryev, has said that Russia has already received requests from 20 different countries from Latin American, the Middle East and Asia, for one billion doses of the vaccine.

For many this is obviously a ground-breaking and positive moment in what has been a dark period in our lives. It is a light at the end of the tunnel. And yet, we are living in a time in which almost everything is politicised, including the race to discover a coronavirus vaccine. We already heard earlier this year [allegations](#) from the UK that Russia was attempting to ‘steal’ information about its vaccine programme, and yet no evidence was ever produced to support the claims. It could only be expected that in this competition to create the first vaccine, that any achievement by Russia in this regard would be rejected outright.

Even without having any of the data regarding the Russian vaccine to hand, experts such as Trump’s chief advisor on coronavirus and Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, **Dr Antonio Fauci**, have dismissed it.

“I hope that the Russians have actually definitively proven that the vaccine is safe and effective,” he said, “I seriously doubt that they’ve done that.”

Why he should doubt it, is not clear. Why would a government risk releasing a vaccine that wasn’t safe and effective? The consequences would be disastrous, and not worth the gamble. **President Vladimir Putin** for his part has said

'I know that it works quite effectively, forms strong immunity, and I repeat, it has passed all the needed checks'.

The urgency with which the vaccine has been created does suggest something of the concern which Russian authorities may have about a resurgence of coronavirus this coming winter. The UK is also deeply worried. So far it has no vaccine ready, and at the same time a steady number of coronavirus cases. The country reached the highest daily number of Covid-19 cases since June of 1148 on Tuesday, although figures now are [difficult to obtain](#) as the government no longer publishes the statistics. The number breaches the official government threshold of 1000 cases a day which it said was needed if the country was to contain the epidemic.

In addition it was revealed on Wednesday that the UK is facing its greatest ever economic recession, and the largest to be faced by any European country since the beginning of the pandemic. The pressure will now be on the British government to get a grip on the situation, as years of underfunding the health and social care system has been exposed during this crisis, meaning the nation has suffered considerably. The latest economic figures also do not bode well for paving a way out of the current quagmire, as the government will have to make more cuts at a time when people are struggling the most. Boris Johnson is under more pressure than ever before to find a solution to the current crisis. Never before has good news been needed so badly, whether it's in the form of a vaccine or otherwise...

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