



## Let's merge vaccine and Zero Covid strategies to Find the Path to Freedom

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Since the beginning of the crisis, there have been two strategies at work around the world to defeat Covid: Zero Covid and vaccines as part of the mitigation strategy. Instead of pitting them against each other, we can mix them to really stop the spread of the virus and look forward to a return to normal life. Let's dare to combine the two approaches, to register the gains that after months of effort, sweat and toil, we are able to offer ourselves.

In the face of Covid-19, many countries have pursued a mitigation strategy aimed at slowing down the circulation of the virus to delay the moment when it disrupts hospitals with an unacceptable occupancy rate. The problem is that the virus is so dynamic that it soon disrupts social life, making it necessary to resort to more or less severe restrictions on a regular basis. It was thus necessary to resort to prolonged confinement, to impose teleworking, to wear masks inside and outside, to close bars and restaurants, to close schools, etc. The arrival of the mRNA messenger vaccine provided a powerful boost to the strategy, allowing us to regain some control over a virus that regularly defies our mitigation strategies. New measures have been introduced, such as mandatory vaccination for health care workers, the obligation of a health pass or a vaccination booklet. However, we realize that this will not be enough to avoid a 4th wave in France or elsewhere. The vaccine, as powerful as it is, is not the grail we wanted it to be. It is unavoidable in the face of the Delta variant, but it is not enough, as the Israeli experience shows. We need to eliminate the virus every time it reappears. The Zero Covid countries have understood this from the beginning and have done it with an efficiency that forces admiration. The so-called Zero Covid countries do not let the Covid-19 circulate. They do not stop identifying all cases. Each case is investigated, traced, isolated, treated, while life goes on as normal as long as this process is not disrupted. Thus, [67% of New Zealanders](#) say that their lives have not been modified or only slightly modified by Covid, compared to only 39% of French people. The Zero Covid strategy requires that the number of cases is never lost, so that tracking remains possible. Deployed in Australia, China, New Zealand, Vietnam, it is getting closer to this in South Korea, thanks to a very efficient technological deployment. The economic and health results in these countries are unambiguous. They are outperforming. However, they face powerful negative externalities from our countries, which are veritable factories of variants, so

that the Zero Covid strategy is regularly undermined by the arrival of new cases on their territory. Australia is currently facing a long containment of Sydney because of Delta. This variant finds a population in Australia protected by the Zero Covid strategy but poorly immunized by vaccines. Zero Covid populations will need the vaccines quickly to continue to benefit in the longer term from their initial investment.

While these countries in Asia and Oceania need to organize accelerated vaccination campaigns, as the [AI Group](#), an Australian employers' union, is calling for, we need to stop giving fuel to the variants.

Conversely, it is essential to protect our vaccine investment by accompanying it with a radical elimination of the virus. By joining the vaccine strategy with the Zero Covid strategy, we would truly give ourselves the opportunity to end this deadly and liberty destroying epidemic. This does not mean that we can lower the grade entirely, but it does mean that we can invest in a strategy that best preserves our freedoms, our economies and our people. This coupling of Zero Covid and vaccines is the most decent approach. It saves us from increasing unacceptable situations such as exposing or isolating our elders, failing to properly protect our children in schools, or blacklisting all those who are unwilling or unable to be vaccinated. As the philosopher Isaiah Berlin wrote, "The best we can do, as a general rule, is to maintain a precarious balance that will prevent the occurrence of desperate situations, of intolerable choices. This is the primary requirement of a decent society." For Zero Covid countries, this means vaccinating their population as much as possible. Elsewhere, it means working towards elimination and continuing to do so until cured without hesitation or fear.

*Cécile Philippe is President of the Institut économique Molinari, a French think tank that has shown a keen interest in the economics of the health crisis. It recently published The Zero Covid strategy protects people and economies more effectively:*

<https://www.institutmolinari.org/2021/04/03/the-zero-covid-strategy-protects-people-and-economies-more-effectively/>.

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