
Create a Vaccine and Save a Country

By: Giusette León García / CubaSi

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The title phrase was "borrowed" from the Cuban singer-songwriter Raúl Torres. Dr. Dagmar García, Research Director of the Finlay Vaccine Institute and one of the Cuban scientists to whom we owe our Soberana 02, the vaccine with which children are immunized these days in Cuba with that infinite modesty that almost always accompanies true greatness, she expressed during the vaccinations at a Havana school:

"... for us, as scientists, the only thing we've done is what we know best how to do: we know how to make vaccines and that's what we have dedicated ourselves to in the last year, trying to develop as quickly as possible a vaccine that's safe and effective enough in order to immunize the entire population, even young children."

So, when it was his turn to sing before teachers, health personnel, parents and students of Gonzalo de Quesada elementary school, the author of *Cabalgando con Fidel*, seized the chance to justly clarify: create a vaccine and save a country.

Days like today will be unforgettable for Dagmar and her colleagues, for that reason and because we are not talking about geniuses locked up in their labs, with large glasses and even taller egos, but about brilliant men and women who put their hearts into each project, This photo with a recently immunized girl, the thanks from a mother, this multiplied joy, this hope, they are worth for them the long hours of sacrifice and dedication and, they went out to enjoy big:

"It's a pleasure to be here today, we've made several work teams, but today to go out and enjoy for what we've been working hard in a full year. We've divided the members of the project and we are visiting many vaccination centers in all the municipalities of the city to share with parents and children and, above all, to enjoy it ".

In five minutes, Dagmar summarized everything, or almost everything, that families might be concerned about regarding the vaccination in the pediatric population. Data that have already been published, but always worth to repeat and she's always comforting to hear them like this, directly, first-hand.

Vaccinating children was contemplated from day one

"Children in Cuba represent approximately 25% of the population, therefore we all knew when this story began that, at some point, we were going to have to vaccinate them, that is, there was no alternative to vaccinate adults and not end up vaccinating children. But to get to vaccinate children, obviously, the vaccine had to travel a path, the one that has been traveled, where all safety evidence has been accumulated first. We reached this point with the full guarantee that the adverse event profile of the vaccine is the characteristic of any other pediatric vaccine ... "

Minimal adverse reactions, minimal leaning to zero

"You will see that your children after leaving here the most they will feel will be some pain in the arm, the frequency of appearance of other events such as local redness, burning, local swelling, is very low, in less than 1% of the people we've vaccinated have appeared these events. Fever practically does not appear in adults and in children no fever has been reported, it doesn't mean that any of these events cannot occur, but they have a very low frequency of appearance, "explained the specialist."

Immune response superior to that of adults

"In terms of immunogenicity or immune response, we have already done a study here in Havana at Juan Manuel Márquez hospital and in two polyclinics in the capital, one in Marianao and one in Playa municipalities , in which we vaccinated 350 children, which we can say were the first brave children in taking the vaccination, who really entered that trial with a huge will on behalf of the parents and the children themselves, because they were children who besides the three doses of vaccine, we had to take three blood samples, we ran PCR tests before each dose of vaccine, they had to go every day after each dose to a medical consultation to evaluate adverse events, that is, it has been a job of great professionalism, of great compliance from the ethical point of view, what it means doing research on young children and today we can proudly say that there are already more than 700 thousand children vaccinated in the country, between ages 2-18 and the goal is that before the end of September all Cuban children can already have the first dose.

"What are experiencing in the clinical trials? Unlike in adults, where the response after two doses is very positive in approximately 70% of adults and with the third we reach more than 90%; in the case of children, since the second dose, more than 90% of children already have a very good immune response, therefore, the third dose ends up immunologically closing the order, but after two doses the results in children are really very, very positive. "

But ... we won't let trust turn into danger

"It does not mean that we don't need the third dose or that after the second we can go out to play soccer and visit parks, we will have to continue taking care of ourselves and the day will come when we can return to normal life and when schools can return to have the usual noise with all the children. "

Bottom line: this vaccine is great

"Convey peace of mind to parents, we have a very safe vaccine. This vaccine is made by the same scientists and it's produced in the same facilities where all the vaccines that our children have received since they were born are made, on the same technological platform, to put it simpler, that gives us a huge peace of mind and, of course, there's a whole surveillance system set for adverse events, that's why children have to spend an hour under observation, that's why if an adverse event occurs they have to go to the system and report it, but the reality is that so far everything has gone very smoothly. "

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff