

Boğaziçi University's COVID Vaccine Research, Explained

We're at a point in the COVID-19 pandemic where so many people came down with the virus that it's impossible to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2 with contact tracing and quarantining. The world wasn't ready for this, our pandemic prevention policies have failed because of the lack of political will to implement them and the virus isn't going away anytime soon. For months now our only hope for ending this pandemic is finding a safe and effective vaccine. According to the New York Times 44 vaccines are in human trials with 5 of them being in the third and final phase of tests¹.

It's expected that a small number of people, starting with healthcare workers and then people with chronic illnesses and people over 65 will be able to access a vaccine before the end of the year. A very small number of people in Turkey have already been inoculated, some healthcare workers have started to participate in the vaccine trials of companies from China and Russia. The US' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is preparing to have the vaccines of Moderna and Pfizer distributed throughout the US by the end of 2020². Despite these developments it's not expected of other research efforts to stop after the first vaccines are approved. Some countries have already ordered hundreds of millions of doses from various countries but it's not currently known whether the Turkish Government has such an order.

These two reasons are why vaccine research efforts in Turkey are so critical. Being in the back of a COVID vaccine waiting list could delay the end of the pandemic in Turkey and mean the loss of many more lives. According to the WHO, there are eight organizations in Turkey working to produce a COVID vaccine. One of them is Boğaziçi University.

Spearheaded by Professor Nesrin Özören, Boğaziçi University's efforts to find a COVID-19 vaccine have reached the preclinical phase in late August, initiating trials on animals. Özören has 15 researchers on her team from Boğaziçi University and İstanbul Technical University, based on what she calls "micro globes", using ASC specks to deliver antibodies to humans³.

She stated in an interview to Anadolu Agency that researchers in Turkey share materials and Turkey recently put together 3-4 centers to conduct phase 1 trials. She also said in an online event she was hoping Turkey would have one or two vaccines developed in 2021⁴.

All the media attention and coverage Prof. Özören and our university have been getting recently is certainly encouraging but brings about more questions about our faculty's conduct

¹ New York Times, Coronavirus Vaccine Tracker. Accessed October 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/science/coronavirus-vaccine-tracker.html>

² CDC, COVID - 19 VACCINATION SCENARIOS FOR JURISDICTIONAL PLANNING PHASE 1, Q4 2020

³ Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Haberler, Prof. Dr. Nesrin Özören ve ekibi Kovid-19 aşısında hayvan deneyi aşamasına geçti. Accessed October 2020 <https://haberler.boun.edu.tr/tr/haber/prof-dr-nesrin-ozoren-ve-ekibi-kovid-19-asisinda-hayvan-deneyi-asamasina-gecti>

⁴ Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Haberler, Yerli aşı için hedef 2021. Accessed October 2020 <https://haberler.boun.edu.tr/tr/haber/yerli-asi-icin-hedef-2021>

when they're not teaching or conducting research. Last year Özören Tweeted she “would never want [being LGBTQ+] to be fashionable in Turkey.” Students from Boğaziçi University petitioned the Rector for her remarks to be investigated on the University Life Ethics Commission but their petition was rejected⁵.

Prof. Nesrin Özören wasn't asked for a comment on this article as the author of this article was blocked by her on Twitter at the time of writing.

⁵ Kaos GL, Boğaziçi Rektörlüğü, LGBTİ+'lara ayrımcı söylemi Etik Kurul'a sevki “uygun görmedi”! Accessed October 2020 <https://kaosgl.org/haber/bogazici-rektorlugu-lgbti-lara-ayrimci-soylemi-etik-kurul-a-sevki-uygun-gormedi>