

Policy Recommendations for Empowering healthcare professionals for everyone's protection



Taking action on **seasonal influenza**: why it matters

Around 50 million people are infected with seasonal influenza (commonly known as the flu) in the European Union (EU) every year.¹ Although the EU and its Member States aim to vaccinate 75% of people among at-risk groups for seasonal influenza, as set out in the Council Recommendation of 2009 on seasonal influenza vaccination,² this objective has yet to be reached.³ While on average just over half of people over 65 in the EU are vaccinated for seasonal influenza, in countries such as Bulgaria and Latvia less than 10% are vaccinated.⁴

The economic and health burden of seasonal influenza is significant. A recent study found that between 16,000 and 39,000 people in the EU die due

to seasonal influenza every year.⁵ Seasonal influenza infections burden already overstretched health systems and lead to indirect costs through the loss of millions of working days.⁶

Immunisation has great potential to improve health and quality of life, enable savings and make health systems more resilient and sustainable. Immunisation is one of the **most cost-effective health interventions** in existence. Currently representing **less than 0.5% of healthcare budgets** in most EU countries, more must be invested in immunisation to reap the full benefits.⁷ Worryingly, **vaccine confidence** has declined in the EU since 2020.⁸

The essential role of **healthcare professionals**

HCPs have a central role in European healthcare systems and must be in the driver's seat if EU countries are to increase vaccine uptake. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists are the most trusted sources of information who can play an essential role in informing and motivating people to get vaccinated. This is not only true for seasonal influenza vaccination campaigns but applies to all types of immunisation. Indeed, studies show that **people are 14 times more likely to get vaccinated if their doctor, nurse or pharmacist recommends it.**⁹

It is also important to note that all three groups are keen to play an active role in immunisation. All HCPs therefore need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, tools and incentives to do the essential work of immunisation. This would also help them stem and reverse the tide of vaccine hesitancy. This is why, for the occasion of EU Flu Day 2023, **the Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination has developed Policy Recommendations to empower HCPs to protect everyone from seasonal influenza through immunisation.**

1. European Vaccination Information Portal: 'Influenza'. <https://vaccination-info.eu/en/disease-factsheets/influenza> 2. Council Recommendation of 22 December 2009 on seasonal influenza vaccination (2009/1019/EU). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H1019&from=HU> 3. ECDC. Influenza vaccination coverage rates in the EU/EEA (18 December 2018). <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/seasonal-influenza/prevention-and-control/vaccines/vaccination-coverage> 4. Eurostat: Influenza Statistics (July 2023) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Influenza_statistics 5. John Paget et al. (2022). Estimates of mortality associated with seasonal influenza for the European Union from the GLaMOR project. PMC PubMed Central. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8923032/> 6. Robert J. Romanelli et al. (2023). The societal and indirect economic burden of seasonal influenza in the United Kingdom. USA/UK RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/research/projects/societal-and-indirect-economic-burden-of-influenza.html> 7. Pascaline Faivre et al. (2021). Immunization funding across 28 European countries, Expert Review of Vaccines. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14760584.2021.1905257> 8. Alexandre de Figueiredo et al. (August 2022). State of Vaccine Confidence in the European Union 2022. https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/2022_confidence_rep_en.pdf 9. Lewis-Parma H et al. (2002). 'Achieving National Influenza Vaccine Targets-an Investigation of the Factors Affecting Influenza Vaccine Uptake in Older People and People With Diabetes'. https://www.unboundmedicine.com/medline/citation/12166297/Achieving_national_influenza_vaccine_targets_an_investigation_of_the_factors_affecting_influenza_vaccine_uptake_in_older_people_and_people_with_diabetes_

The EU should:

- Provide guidance and call on Member States to **address the current skills gap within the health workforce on immunisation** by updating university curricula to include relevant training on immunisation and communication skills with the aim of addressing inequalities between Member States and ensure an efficient and consistent approach across Europe
- **Establish platforms for best practice sharing** between HCPs and between Member States
- Work with the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide **timely evidence and data** to support Member States' policymaking on immunisation and education and training of HCPs
- **Continue work to raise awareness** on the importance of immunisation at regional level

Member States should:

- **Update university curricula** to include relevant training on immunisation and communication skills
- **Develop easy-to-use materials for information and awareness-raising** for HCPs to use in their work with patients
- Facilitate forums for dialogue and collaboration, **provide support to HCP organisations and associations**, as well as specific projects on immunisation, and **regularly consult them as part of decision-making processes**
- **Run awareness-raising campaigns** on the importance of immunisation targeted at HCPs
- **Expand vaccination delivery channels to facilitate access to vaccination**



This will allow HCPs to:

- Engage in informing, supporting and educating their peers
- Encourage the public to get vaccinated and contribute to their country reaching the EU's 75% target for flu vaccination among risk groups
- And, ultimately, increase the protection in society against vaccine-preventable diseases



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