

Closing immunisation gaps: a comprehensive framework for respiratory infection prevention (#EUREspiDay by #EUFluDay event)

On Wednesday, 15 October, over 60 people gathered at the European Parliament to participate in the 2025 #EUREspiDay (formerly #EUFluDay) event, with nearly 1000 viewers online. Hosted by **MEP Billy Kelleher** (Renew Europe, Ireland), with remarks by Steering Group Co-Chair **MEP Dolors Montserrat** (European People's Party, Spain), the event marked the official launch of the Steering Group's [new manifesto](#) calling for a Council Recommendation on the value of immunisation against respiratory infections.

Opening remarks

Both MEP Kelleher and MEP Montserrat supported the Steering Group's call for a Council Recommendation. **MEP Montserrat** shared Spain's success in implementing a pioneering RSV immunisation programme for infants, demonstrating how real progress against respiratory infections can be achieved. **MEP Kelleher** stressed the need to tackle immunisation mis- and disinformation, as well as the combined burden of flu, RSV, pneumococcal disease, and COVID-19. He highlighted Ireland's leadership in prevention and its strong record on respiratory health, marked by high immunisation uptake and public confidence.

Keynote speeches

Co-Chair of the Steering Group and Chair of the European Scientific Working Group on Influenza and other Respiratory Viruses ([ESWI](#)), **Colin Russell**, [presented the manifesto](#), calling for a new European framework updating the [2009 Council Recommendation on Seasonal Influenza Vaccination](#). The proposed update reflects the growing recognition of the burden posed not only by flu, but also COVID-19, RSV, and pneumococcal disease. The manifesto calls on Member States to invest in immunisation, including by using New Economic Governance Framework flexibilities to exclude immunisation spending from caps on country budget deficits, strengthen surveillance for respiratory infections, and address vaccine mis- and disinformation. It also advocates for an EU-wide coverage target, using the existing 75% target for influenza in at risk populations as a benchmark, to increase immunisation rates for COVID-19, RSV, and pneumococcal disease.

Rita Figueira, DG SANTE, outlined the European Commission's efforts to increase immunisation coverage and strengthen data collection for respiratory infections, highlighting the relevance of prevention against respiratory infections in the context of the forthcoming EU Cardiovascular Health Plan. Ms. Figueira underlined EU initiatives supporting respiratory infection prevention, including efforts to help Member States overcome barriers to immunisation, promoting health literacy among health workers and patients, supporting the Coalition for Vaccination, and strengthening disease surveillance, including through the European Respiratory Virus Surveillance Summary (ERVISS). She highlighted the evolving immunisation landscape, noting the introduction of new RSV vaccines, and emphasised the importance of adopting a life-course approach to immunisation.

Former Minister for Health of Ireland and Healthcare Partner at CF **Stephen Donnelly** shared his experience of Ireland's COVID-19 vaccine rollout and emphasised the need for all stakeholders to work together to build and maintain public trust in immunisation. He noted that Ireland's success in maintaining public trust and achieving high immunisation coverage is rooted in a culture of leading with science. Mr. Donnelly also added that facilitating immunisation access through pharmacies can support convenience and increase overall uptake.

Rachael Thomas, RSV Patient Network, delivered a powerful testimony, sharing how the loss of her 13-week-old son, Alexander, to RSV profoundly affected her and her family. She noted that the impact of RSV is long-lasting, extending beyond potential side effects – such as developmental delays, asthma, and other chronic conditions – to the enduring emotional toll it takes on patients and their families. Ms. Thomas stressed the importance of education in helping people understand the potential impact of RSV and the benefits of immunisation. She also underlined the need to build a foundation of trust between patients and healthcare professionals to achieve effective prevention.

Panel discussion

Dr. Marta Nunes, Director, Centre of Excellence in Respiratory Pathogens, drew four key lessons from the flu blueprint that can inspire action on other respiratory infections. She highlighted the importance of setting targets, building integrated systems for surveillance and data collection, harnessing Real-World Evidence to inform policy, and uniting a broad coalition of stakeholders, from policymakers to healthcare professionals and scientists, to drive coordinated and lasting impact.

Dr. Leif Erik Sander, Director of the Department of Infectious Diseases and Critical Care Medicine at the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, stressed that COVID-19 vaccines are a powerful but still underused prevention tool, with the capacity to ease both acute and long-term disease burdens. He highlighted links between respiratory infections and noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease and dementia, noting their significant contribution to Europe's overall health burden. He also called for a shift in mindset, moving from an emergency-driven response to COVID-19 toward integrating routine preparedness and prevention into long-term health strategies.

Dr. Louis Bont, Chair ReSViNET, outlined the high burden of RSV, noting that it affects both children and the elderly. He advocated for large-scale immunisation of infants and improved education and surveillance for the disease, while emphasising the importance of building political support for improved immunisation strategies.

Anna van Renen, Research and Policy Officer at International Longevity Centre UK, highlighted the stark gap in immunisation coverage rates, with infants generally having much higher rates than at-risk groups and older adults. She stressed the need to promote equity in immunisation across the life-course and pointed to the limited reporting of pneumococcal disease in many EU countries.

Audience Discussion

Nicola Bedlington shared a statement on behalf of the **European Health Management Association**, underscoring the role of health management in preventing respiratory infections. The

statement identified priority areas like strengthening surveillance and improving immunisation coverage among older adults and integrating new prophylactic measures for infants. **Emilie Karafillakis**, European Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project, stressed the need to embed patient perspectives at the heart of communication efforts to build lasting public trust in immunisation. **Frazer Goodwin**, Policy Coordinator at European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patient's Association (EFA), drew attention to the significant and long lasting impact of respiratory infections on people living with allergy and airways diseases.