



**EU Manifesto**  
ON INFLUENZA VACCINATION

# Setting the Annual European Influenza Vaccination Day



## Concept paper – October 2018

The Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination is a group of experts which was convened in November 2017 to develop the Manifesto on Influenza Vaccination. The Steering Group is co-chaired by a policy-maker, Member of the European Parliament, Françoise Grossetête and a vaccination expert, Prof. Thomas Szucs.

# Setting a European Influenza Vaccination Day

Concept paper - October 2018

In the light of recently low uptake of seasonal influenza vaccination in Europe, causing approx. 44.000 deaths annually<sup>1</sup>, we call for policy-makers, healthcare professionals and other stakeholders committed to protecting people from influenza infection, to establish an annual European Influenza Vaccination Day.

The European Parliament in its Resolution on Vaccine hesitancy and drop in vaccination rates in Europe calls on the European Commission to establish a “European influenza vaccination day”. It could be used each year to launch the vaccination campaign in line with the 75 % coverage target laid down in the European Council recommendations on seasonal influenza.<sup>2</sup>

We, the Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination, are calling for the establishment of an annual European Influenza Vaccination Day starting from 2019.

We aim at reminding decision-makers and the broader public about the significant remaining burden of influenza and the under-use of vaccination which is the most cost-effective, preventive measure available today.

We believe this European Influenza Vaccination Day should be organized by the European Institutions, with the involvement of EU Member States, to call for coordinated vaccination campaigns across Europe and to increase vaccination coverage rates in Europe.

## 1. Multi-stakeholder Group calling for the European Influenza Vaccination Day

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Because of the urgency for stronger policy-driven actions to reduce the burden of influenza and more coordinated approach across Europe, we set up the Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination, which brings multiple stakeholders together around shared policy asks. The Steering Group is supported by Vaccines Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Our first action as the Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination has been the development of the European Manifesto on Influenza Vaccination. Through combining different stakeholders’ knowledge, skills and resources in a unified voice, the Manifesto represents a tangible means of highlighting the challenges of influenza vaccination in Europe. Under a unique, first-ever leadership of politician and scientist, the Steering Group Members are convinced that the evidence should drive policies and every stakeholder has an important role to fulfill

in the collective fight against influenza. For this reason, the Steering Group has presented high-level policy recommendations around the burden of the disease, influenza awareness & public trust and good practices & access.

We believe that by combining our forces, we will steer the current debate around vaccination in the right direction and make a real, sustainable change in vaccine policies and perception.

One of the central actions put forward by the Steering Group is to advocate for the establishment of an annual European Influenza Vaccination Day which would contribute to the objective of increasing seasonal influenza coverage rates in Europe. With our unique, joint initiative, we are now calling the European Institutions and EU Member States to support us in setting-out an annual day.

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1 <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/low-uptake-seasonal-influenza-vaccination-europe-may-jeopardise-capacity-protect-people>

2 European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018 on vaccine hesitancy and the drop-in vaccination rates in Europe (2017/2951(RSP))

3 <https://www.vaccineseuropa.eu/about-vaccines-europe/who-we-are/>

## 2. Objectives of the European Influenza Vaccination Day

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The main objective of the annual European Influenza Vaccination Day would be to raise awareness around the burden of influenza to support improving influenza vaccine uptake rates, by allowing coordinated messages from different stakeholders to be delivered annually.

We are calling for a combined European and national initiatives that will gather the healthcare community around the same goals – raise awareness about influenza, improve influenza vaccination uptake rates and protect people against this severe disease and

its consequences. This could leverage some of current initiatives, such as the European Immunization Week, the WHO/Europe Flu Awareness campaign or national influenza campaigns, with a clear focus on EU countries.

The European Influenza Vaccination Day will become an annual meeting point for the Manifesto supporters and beyond. It will allow all stakeholders at national/regional/local levels who promote influenza vaccination to evaluate the progress made and agree on the next priority areas.

The main objectives would be to:

- Communicate on the burden of influenza to prevent cases of severe illness and deaths;
- Secure accurate monitoring of epidemiology, disease burden and vaccination coverage rates in all EU countries, aligned with recommended populations;
- Ensure use of data collected to optimize influenza vaccination policy management and tailored communication to healthcare professionals and recommended at-risk groups;
- Ensure that the 75% vaccination coverage rate targets are implemented in national, regional or local action plans or policies, as appropriate;
- Raise awareness of to the importance and benefits of influenza vaccination within at-risk groups and healthcare professionals;
- Stimulate a multi-stakeholder dialogue and exchange of good practice on the optimal implementation of influenza vaccination at European and national level, building trust in influenza vaccination.

Only sustainable vaccination initiatives and policy actions can improve influenza vaccination coverage rates, contributing to better protection of people against influenza, especially those who are at high-risk. With the engagement and joint action of the health community, the annual European Influenza Vaccination Day can ensure influenza vaccination remains a permanent topic on the political agenda over the years and fulfills its goals.

### 3. Potential theme of the First European Influenza Vaccination Day in 2019

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For the first edition, we propose to focus on one of our main priorities: the role of healthcare professionals in fighting influenza. The objective would be to raise awareness about their roles and responsibilities towards patients in promoting influenza vaccination.

It could be a relevant starting point as one of our asks in the Manifesto was to encourage the organization of training programs for healthcare professionals to strengthen their role in influenza vaccination initiatives.

The First European Influenza Vaccination Day in 2019 could inform healthcare professionals on how to educate their patients on the benefits of influenza vaccination, as well as on the ethical obligation of

getting vaccinated themselves to protect others. It would also help stimulate cross-collaboration between the different healthcare professionals and allow for best practice sharing at European and national levels.

To maximize impact and visibility, our recommendation would be to schedule the European Influenza Vaccination Day either at the beginning of the influenza season in Europe in October or in April, to coincide with the European Immunization Week (from 22nd-28th April 2019), taking an opportunity to assess lessons learnt from the just finished influenza season and optimize preparation for the forthcoming one.

### 4. Shared responsibility

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The fight against the burden of influenza is a shared responsibility. To successfully launch and continue the annual European Influenza Vaccination Day, we, the Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination, need a strong commitment and involvement on the day from the broader community:

- European institutions, agencies and other relevant international organizations (e.g. WHO Europe) to launch and support the European Influenza Vaccination Day;
- National governments, policy makers, institutions and agencies in the EU Member States;
- European and national healthcare professionals' associations;
- European and national patient advocacy groups;
- Civil society groups;
- Scientific and academic organizations;
- Key opinion leaders in public health, infectious diseases, primary care etc.

## About influenza

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### a. The burden of influenza

Influenza is an acute respiratory infection that spreads easily from one individual to another and spreads year-round in all parts of the world. In Europe, it usually occurs as an annual, seasonal epidemic during winter - from October to March.

Influenza is usually mistaken with a common cold. However, unlike the latter, influenza can cause severe illness or even death, especially in vulnerable groups of people. In Europe, influenza annual epidemics are estimated cause 4 -50 million symptomatic cases each year, and about 15 000 to 70 000 deaths<sup>4</sup>. For that reason, influenza should be considered as a serious public health problem by both governments and citizens.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), vaccination is the most effective measure to prevent severe diseases caused by influenza virus<sup>5</sup>. Vaccination can save lives, reduce illnesses and contribute to a longer life expectancy and good economy by creating savings in healthcare budgets and stimulating population's productivity.

### b. Vaccination recognised as an important public health measure

In the European Union, many policy initiatives have been undertaken in the field of influenza to ensure optimal protection of people through influenza vaccination. Still, the influenza vaccination coverage

is below the objectives set by the 2009 European Council Recommendation on seasonal influenza<sup>6</sup>.

As stated by both the WHO and ECDC, the low uptake of seasonal influenza vaccination in Europe jeopardizes the capacity to protect people during annual epidemics and the next pandemic<sup>7</sup>.

In this context, on 26th April 2018 the European Commission adopted a proposal for Council Recommendation on Strengthened Cooperation against Vaccine Preventable Diseases which calls for joint action to increase vaccination coverage and ensures that everybody in the European Union has access to vaccination.

Sharing similar concerns over public protection against vaccine-preventable diseases, on 19th April 2018, the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution on vaccine hesitancy and the drop of vaccination rates<sup>8</sup> in Europe.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) urged the European Commission to step up its support for national vaccination efforts, strengthening the EU legal basis for immunisation coverage.

Finally, the European Parliament has expressively called on the European Commission to establish targeted vaccination initiatives, such as a 'European influenza vaccination day', which could be used each year to launch the vaccination campaign in line with the 75 % coverage target laid down in the European Council recommendations on seasonal influenza.

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4 Factsheet about influenza, ECDC, <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/seasonal-influenza/facts/factsheet>.

5 WHO Europe/ECDC joint statement: Low uptake of seasonal influenza vaccination in Europe may jeopardize capacity to protect people in next pandemic, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/press-releases/2018/who-europeecdc-joint-statement-low-uptake-of-seasonal-influenza-vaccination-in-europe-may-jeopardize-capacity-to-protect-people-in-next-pandemic>.

6 Council Recommendation of 22 December 2009 on seasonal influenza vaccination, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:348:0071:0072:EN:PDF>.

7 WHO Europe/ECDC joint statement: Low uptake of seasonal influenza vaccination in Europe may jeopardize capacity to protect people in next pandemic, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/press-releases/2018/who-europeecdc-joint-statement-low-uptake-of-seasonal-influenza-vaccination-in-europe-may-jeopardize-capacity-to-protect-people-in-next-pandemic>.

8 European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018 on vaccine hesitancy and the drop in vaccination rates in Europe, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2018-0188+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

## About us

The Steering Group on Influenza Vaccination is a group of experts which was convened in November 2017 to develop the Manifesto. The Steering Group is co-chaired by a policy-maker, Member of European Parliament, Françoise Grossetête and a vaccination expert, **Prof. Thomas Szucs**.

Current Members of the Steering Group include:

- **Jan de Belie**, Professional Affairs Advisor, Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU)
- **Susanna Esposito**, President, the World Association for Infectious Diseases and Immunological Disorders (WAidid), Full Professor of Paediatrics, Università degli Studi di Perugia, Perugia, Italy;
- **Marco Goeijenbier**, Internal Medicine Harbor Hospital, Institute for Tropical Diseases, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, Member of the European Scientific Working Group on Influenza (ESWI)
- **Emilie Karafilakis**, Research Fellow, the Vaccine Confidence Project, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)
- **Sally Kendall**, Chair, the European Forum for Primary Care (EFPC), Professor of Community Nursing and Public Health, Centre for Health Services Studies, University of Kent

- **Ber Oomen**, Executive Secretary, the European Specialist Nurses Organisations (ESNO)
- **Susanna Palkonen**, Director, the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Association (EFANET)
- **Julia Tainijoki-Seyer**, Medical Advisor, the World Medical Association (WMA)

With the support of a Secretariat, provided by Hanover Communications, the Group's insight and experience has been applied in the development of the Manifesto on Influenza Vaccination, including policy requirements addressed to national policy-makers to increase the influenza vaccination coverage in accordance with the 2009 Council Recommendation on seasonal influenza.

The Steering Group is committed to:

- Disseminating the Manifesto (i.e., presenting the Manifesto and the work of the Steering Group on public occasions)
- Driving and inputting into the initiatives following the Manifesto on Influenza (e.g., policy recommendations to implement the Manifesto).



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