

ECDC: Influenza vaccination coverage rates insufficient across EU member states

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None of the European Union (EU) Member States could demonstrate that they reach the EU target of 75% influenza vaccination coverage for vulnerable groups, according to a new report from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Influenza vaccination coverage remains low in many countries, and leads to severe disease, hospitalisations and premature deaths. If no improvements in the vaccine uptake will be seen, significant burden on the healthcare systems can be expected also during this upcoming winter season.

Influenza vaccination coverage rates for the 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons were provided by 19 Member States. Detailed information was provided for specific risk groups such as the elderly, individuals with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities. These groups are the most likely to suffer serious complications, which is why most countries prioritize them for vaccination.

Only a few of the EU Member States that participated in the survey come close to achieving the 75% vaccination coverage target, which has been set by the EU to protect tens of thousands of persons at risk of death and serious illness.

"The results of this survey have shown that achieving high vaccination coverage rates for those particularly at risk of developing severe complications remains a serious public health challenge" says Pasi Penttinen, ECDC Head of Influenza Disease Programme. "The best way

to prevent or minimize severe disease from [influenza](#) among vulnerable groups is timely vaccination, even though the effectiveness of the [vaccine](#) varies depending on the virus in circulation. Sufficient vaccination coverage also saves healthcare systems money in decreased consultation rates and hospitalisations."

More encouragingly, approximately half of the EU Member States reported increased use of newer influenza vaccines that provide broader protection during the 2017/18 season. These new vaccines contain four influenza strains or an adjuvant. Also, six Member States reported using newer immunisation strategies which target additional age groups such as children. Whether the newer vaccines and vaccination strategies will provide better overall protection will be studied by ECDC in the coming winter seasons.

For patients with severe influenza, or those unable to respond to vaccination due to disease or treatment affecting the immune system, the use of influenza antivirals may be life-saving. Most EU Member States have issued recommendations for the use of influenza antivirals.

The ECDC report recommends improving vaccination [coverage](#) rates through targeted communication campaigns towards vulnerable groups, as well as ensuring adequate and sustainable funding of national vaccination programmes. Countries that do not yet have a seasonal influenza vaccination action plan to achieve higher seasonal [influenza vaccination coverage](#) rates are encouraged to develop and adopt such a plan, document or policy.

More information: The ECDC report Seasonal influenza vaccination and antiviral use in EU/EEA Member States - Overview of vaccine recommendations for 2017-18 and vaccination coverage rates for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 influenza seasons is available at : [ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications ... eu-eea-member-states](https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications...eu-eea-member-states)

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