

Questions & Answers: Global Vaccination Summit

The European Commission organises, in cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO), a [Global Vaccination Summit](#) on 12 September 2019, in Brussels.

The overall objective is to give high-level visibility and political endorsement to the topic of vaccination, which is one of the most successful public health measures, saving millions of lives every year. This event aims at demonstrating EU leadership for a global commitment to vaccination boosts political commitment towards eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases, and engages political leaders and leaders from scientific, medical, industry, philanthropic and civil society in global action against the spread of vaccine misinformation.

What are the benefits of vaccination?

Vaccination is one of the greatest successes of public health. Worldwide, it saves at least 2-3 million lives each year. Before vaccines were given, children often died young or become crippled for life. Vaccination prevents 2.7 million people from contracting measles, 2 million from getting neonatal tetanus, and 1 million from getting pertussis (whooping cough) each year. It has also led to the eradication of smallpox, and the near elimination of polio. In Europe, seasonal flu vaccination prevents around 2 million people from getting the flu each year.

Vaccines are a safe and effective way of protecting children and adults from serious illness and complications from vaccine-preventable diseases. They can prevent a disease from occurring in the first place, saving human suffering, and reducing healthcare costs. Vaccines do not only protect the person vaccinated, they also protect others, provided that 'herd immunity' is reached. In the case of measles, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, a 95% coverage rate is required to protect the whole community.

Are vaccines safe?

Yes, vaccines are safe. An extensive body of research has proven the effectiveness and safety of vaccines. The EU has very strict rules for the market authorisation of vaccines. On average, it takes 12 to 15 years, including extensive clinical studies, to develop a vaccine. Once on the market, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) continues to supervise a vaccine's safety, to detect, prevent and communicate any adverse effects. Reports of a link between the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism, for example, were based on a now discredited study.

Are vaccine-preventable diseases increasing in the EU?

The surge in measles cases that began in 2018 has continued into 2019, with

approximately 90 000 cases reported for the first half of the year in the WHO European region. This is already more than the number of cases recorded for the whole year of 2018 (84 462).

Between 1 January 2016 and 31 March 2019, 84 deaths were reported for the EU/EEA countries alone. From July 2018 to June 2019, 11 EU/EEA Member States reported 483 cases of rubella. At the end of 2018, four European countries lost their measles elimination status^[1].

Seasonal flu vaccination coverage in older age groups has also decreased in the past few years in the majority of EU countries, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) estimates that 40 000 people in Europe – many of whom are elderly – die prematurely from complications from seasonal flu every year.

What are the key drivers of decreasing vaccination coverage?

There are several reasons for decreasing vaccination coverage, including challenges related to the access to and the organisation of vaccine services.

Another important reason is **vaccine hesitancy**. Misconceptions about vaccination have shifted the public focus away from the benefits of vaccination, towards distrust in science and fear of possible side effects. While routine vaccination has led to a sharp reduction in vaccine-preventable diseases, it has also led to the severity of such diseases frequently being under-estimated by citizens and healthcare workers alike.

Decreasing vaccine confidence, increasing number of deaths and growing cases of vaccine-preventable diseases have led the WHO to declare vaccine hesitancy as one of the main threats to global health for 2019.

The EU has among the lowest confidence in the safety and effectiveness of vaccines worldwide. Almost half of the EU public (48%) believes that vaccines can often produce serious side effects, 38% think they can cause the diseases against which they protect and 31% are convinced that they can weaken the immune system^[2]. For example, in France, one-third of people believe vaccines to be unsafe^[3].

Another important reason is the variation of **vaccination policies and schedules** between EU countries, which can be a particular obstacle to people who move between several EU countries during their lives. Variation related to the timing of vaccines and the number of doses, for example, can cause confusion, and this can result in children not getting all the vaccines they need. Different vaccination policies between countries can also lead to the perception that there are differences in opinion on the vaccines themselves.

Other factors that play a role in immunisation gaps include **vaccine shortages**, challenges related to the **research and development** for new and existing vaccines, including unpredictable demand and insufficient motivation for industry to make the necessary investments in terms of financing and expertise, and constraints linked to public financing.

Is disinformation a determinant for lower vaccine coverage?

Yes. The exposure of citizens to large-scale disinformation, including misleading or outright false information, is a major challenge for Europe. Disinformation is amplified by modern technology and the rapid spread of content on the internet.

Fighting disinformation[4] has to be a coordinated effort involving institutions, social platforms, the media and citizens. The European Commission is taking action to address online disinformation. In 2018, it invited social media platforms to subscribe to a Code of Practice on Disinformation, which commits them to enable monitoring of online disinformation, including on vaccines.[5]

What are the EU recent actions regarding vaccination?

Following the Council Recommendation adopted in December 2018[6], several actions have already been implemented including the Coalition for Vaccination and the Joint Procurement of pandemic influenza vaccine[7] and others are on track. This includes the development of a common vaccination card, the support to research and innovation for the development of new vaccines or the establishment of a European Vaccination Information Sharing System)[8].

What will be discussed during the Global Vaccination Summit?

The event brings together around 400 political leaders, high-level representatives from international organisations, health ministries, leading academics, scientists and health professionals, the private sector and non-governmental organisations. Keynote speakers and participants include Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO and Her Majesty the Queen of the Belgians.

There are three main topics for the Summit:

Roundtable 1: In Vaccines we trust. Strategies to increase vaccine confidence, and improve the uptake of vaccines and vaccination coverage; the role and responsibility of media, and the use of innovative communication strategies and tools to help increase vaccine confidence by all actors; and the possible actions by stakeholders – decision-makers, policy-makers, health professionals, civil society, organisations and communities – to increase vaccine confidence.

Roundtable 2: The Magic of Science. Vaccine development cycle and major challenges to the development of effective vaccines, and determine which vaccines are needed; efficient use of existing and novel models for funding vaccine R&D and stimulating international collaborations for public health benefits; opportunities and major challenges to having a vaccine RD&I responding to global public health needs;

Roundtable 3: Vaccines Protecting Everyone, Everywhere. Actions to enhance the use and uptake of vaccines in the decade ahead, including in fragile and humanitarian emergency settings; importance of accountability in a successful vaccine programme at all levels and by all people; importance of vaccines

across the life course; vaccination as gateway to the success of primary health care (PHC) and universal health coverage (UHC).

For more information

[Global Vaccination Summit 2019](#)

[Vaccination overview](#)

[Immunisation and vaccines](#)

[1]<http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/press-releases/2019/european-region-loses-ground-in-effort-to-eliminate-measles>

[2]https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/vaccination/docs/20190426_special-eurobarometer-sp488_en.pdf

[3] Wellcome Global Monitor(2018),
<https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/wellcome-global-monitor-2018.pdf>

[4]https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-2914_en.htm

[5]<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/code-practice-disinformation>

[6]
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2018_466_R_0001

[7] See <https://europa.eu/rapid/midday-express-28-03-2019.htm#8> and
https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/preparedness_response/docs/ev_20190328_memo_en.pdf

[8] See roadmap for the implementation of the Council Recommendation:
https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/vaccination/docs/2019-2022_roadmap_en.pdf