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LIFE-COURSE IMMUNISATION

EVENT REPORT | OCTOBER 2018
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In his 2017 State of the Union speech, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said it was “unacceptable” that children are still dying from diseases that can easily be prevented with vaccines, like measles.

In April 2018, the European Commission proposed a Council Recommendation on “Strengthened Cooperation against Vaccine-Preventable Diseases”. The EU executive notes that vaccination programmes need to adopt a life-course approach beyond childhood years.

“This approach aims to ensure a lifelong adequate protection and contributes to healthy living and healthy ageing as well as the sustainability of healthcare systems,” the Commission has emphasised.

In this Special Report, EURACTIV.com will examine the benefits of life-course immunisation, the roles of different stakeholders and possible ways to tackle rising anti-vaccines fake news.

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INTERVIEW

Expert: Life-course immunisation will save costs and lives

By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com



Dr Daphné Holt: "The role of healthcare professionals is also central to the adoption of vaccination programmes." [Sarantis Michalopoulos]

What are the main challenges you are faced with when it comes to a life-course approach on immunisation?

Encouraging society to embrace the idea that vaccination is not just a one-off for children but that is needed at all ages and stages of life, particularly when other issues make infectious diseases more likely and/or more dangerous.

Education is key to this so that people make informed and appropriate decisions about which immunisations and when right from the start. With better information, people will be aware of situation-specific as well as age-specific immunisation.

Healthcare professionals are the most trusted sources of advice, so ensuring they have access to high quality, digestible information and training is critically important.

Helping policymakers to make the same leap to fully espouse the benefits of the life-course approach, leadership is needed from the top but also determined advocacy from the population.

Making behavioural change sustainable is necessary so that

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The adoption of a life-course immunisation approach in the EU will have significant multi-level effects, ranging from a healthier population to savings in healthcare budgets, Dr Daphné Holt told EURACTIV.com.

Dr Daphné Holt is the chair of the Coalition for Life-Course Immunisation. She spoke to EURACTIV's Sarantis Michalopoulos on the sidelines of the European Health Forum in Gastein, Austria.

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

- A life-course immunisation approach will prolong and enhance the quality of life
- For society and governments, there are significant savings from reducing the burden on health and social systems
- The EU can be a focal point for liaising with vaccine developers, manufacturers and distributors
- The European policy momentum is moving in the right direction

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boosting and repeating immunisation becomes part of life's routine. Quality, consistency and transparency of information is paramount in a world in which there is a climate of 'expert denial' and anti-vaccine noise. In this respect, authorities and pro-health groups must engage fully with social media.

What are the benefits of life-course immunisation? Could it potentially lead to savings for the healthcare budgets?

If each individual adopted an LCI approach it could boost their lifetime immunity to infectious disease, leading to a healthier (ageing) population.

Additionally, immunisation against common diseases will protect against co-morbidity effects with other conditions and diseases. This will prolong and enhance the quality of life.

Widespread uptake of immunisation will lead to immunity across the community even protecting those unable or unwilling to be vaccinated as well as those who arrive without a history of immunisation such as refugees.

For society and governments, there are also significant savings from reducing the burden on health and social systems (vaccination may save more than 10x its original cost). Additionally, the impact of antimicrobial resistance is causing higher healthcare costs as well as the growth in difficult to treat diseases and conditions.

Immunisation has been shown to be effective in reducing the impact of antimicrobial resistance and hence healthcare system costs.

What could be done at the EU level in this direction, considering that immunisation is a national competence.

Immunisation is a national competence and so, each nation must make its own leadership and implementation choices. However, the EU has a role to play.

The EU can be a focal point for liaison with vaccine developers, manufacturers and distributors; helping to ensure competitive pricing, efficient and effective purchasing timetables in order to guarantee sufficient supply and even create stockpiles if members want it.

It can encourage the sharing of best practices in production and implementation by member states of National plans to increase coverage so that WHO European action plan meets targets by 2020. The EU can also make funds available for research.

There is an EU Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases. Where does it currently stand?

We are pleased to see the European policy momentum moving in the right direction toward a life-course approach, starting with support from the European parliament with the resolution on vaccine hesitancy which calls on the member states, given the usefulness of vaccination as a preventive tool, to ensure that vaccine coverage is extended beyond early childhood, and that all population groups can be included in a lifelong vaccination approach;

This call seemed to have resonated with the European commissions who included the life-course immunisation heavily in its Council Recommendation proposal presented last summer. Notably, the proposal calls on member states to develop and implement their own national vaccination plans by 2020, following a life-course approach to vaccination.

This comprises routine checks and regular opportunities to vaccinate across all stages of life including at schools, workplaces and care

facilities but also offers provisions for sustainable funding.

The role of healthcare professionals is central to the adoption of vaccination programmes and there is a clear call from all stakeholders on the need to strengthen vaccination training in medical curricula and continuous medical training for all health workers.

It is our understanding that discussions have progressed very quickly since the Commission presented the recommendation and that it will be formally adopted by ministers in December.

We also understand that the references to life-course immunisation from the original Commission proposal I just mentioned were not contentious, and therefore will be in the final text.

How could EU member states be convinced that a holistic approach is needed? Why do you think they have not seen that yet?

The emphasis on the cross-border nature of infectious diseases, shortage of supply and growing anti-vax sentiment means there is common ground within member states for action at an EU level even though health and vaccination remains a country-specific competence.

A holistic approach can be fostered by the involvement of public advocacy at the national and European level and includes cooperation across borders. Healthcare professionals using a multi-disciplinary approach have a large role to play as vaccine advocates both at the public and policy-making level, because once a groundswell of public opinion is built up, the effect will be seen on the political stage.

Recommendation on vaccines should not remain a 'piece of paper', Commission says

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By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com



The recommendation, which comes at a time when anti-vaccination campaigns are on the rise across Europe, should soon be adopted by the EU Council, meaning ministers from all member states. [Sarantis Michalopoulos]

The European Commission's proposed recommendation on strengthened cooperation of all stakeholders against vaccine-preventable diseases should not remain a "piece of paper" as it needs to bring tangible results for all age groups, Commission officials told EURACTIV.com.

The recommendation, which comes at a time when anti-vaccination campaigns are on the rise across Europe, should soon be adopted by the

EU Council, meaning ministers from all member states.

"What we have is a piece of soft law, which is a Council recommendation and contains a whole series of points on which ministers will agree soon," said John Ryan, director of public health in Commission's DG SANTE.

The recommendation is due to be adopted soon by the EU Council. After that, the EU executive will come up with an implementation roadmap. The proposal's main objective is to increase vaccination coverage and ensure

access in immunization through a holistic approach.

"We don't want this to remain a piece of paper. We want to find a way to bring life to the document. We have developed our roadmap, which is an implementation plan containing specific tasks that need to be delivered by specific people," he added.

Referring to the roadmap, Ryan said all would have a role to play, from the European Medicines' Agency

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to the European Center for Disease Prevention Control, from different parts of the Commission to the pharmaceutical industry.

“This is the idea of the roadmap, to create a coalition of stakeholders together with the member states, involving the doctors, the nurses, the pharmacists the pharma industry.”

However, Ryan warned that there is an issue with supply and security of supply.

“If you don’t have the supply, how can you convince people to take up a vaccine if this is not available? We need to ensure investment in vaccination, by member states and the industry and the business model is important there as well,” he said.

LIFE-COURSE APPROACH

According to the proposal, a number of factors ranging from demography to climate change require vaccination programmes with a life-course approach beyond childhood years.

“Vaccination is not just for children and it’s important to have this long-life approach,” DG SANTE’s Deputy Director-General Martin Seychell told EURACTIV.

“Some vaccines, like the one against seasonal flu, are more relevant for the elderly and people with respiratory problems, while several measles fatalities happened in young adults,” he said.

“Unfortunately, a lot of national systems are more efficient in dealing with children and not so efficient in dealing with people beyond a certain age,” he added, stressing that member states need to change this situation and promote vaccination as one of the most effective public health tools available.

‘CAPTURE’ THE SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE

The rise of anti-vaccination campaigns has raised eyebrows in Brussels and the member states, which are trying to find a way to tackle fake news in this field.

Speaking on the sidelines of the “Vaccines for all – Leaving no one behind – A life-course approach to vaccination” event in Gastein’s Health Forum last week, researcher Emilie Karafillakis admitted there are a lot of anti-vaccine messages on social media.

“We know there is something going on there. I think we need to, as public authorities, as communicators and immunisation managers, get on there as well,” she noted.

Karafillakis cited some recent initiatives in Ireland and in Denmark, where Facebook pages were created to reply to questions from the public in specific times about vaccines.

“We need to capture this space and use the means we have to target the population.”

‘COMMUNITY – IMMUNITY’

Jan De Belie from the Pharmaceutical Group of the EU, the European association representing community pharmacists, emphasised the need for a bottom-up approach with an enhanced role for the local communities.

“There is a need for consistent and evidence-based information for all healthcare providers that are in touch with patients.

“We need to engage with them and make sure that every time they access the health care system they can have this evidence-based approach. The crucial point is the local level, as this is the level that healthcare providers understand. It’s engaging within their local community together with all healthcare providers,” he stated.

“We always talk about convincing patients to vaccinate, but we also make health professionals realise

the importance. First to vaccinate themselves and then help their community,” De Belie concluded.

The Coalition for Life-Course Immunisation recently sent a letter to the European Commission asking for a “clear mandate” at the regional and local level for action.

In an interview with EURACTIV, Dr Daphné Holt, the chair of the coalition, said a life-course immunisation approach would prolong and enhance the quality of life but in order for this to happen, public awareness campaigns are needed as well as health professionals to be provided with tools and skills for communication and advocacy.

PROMOTED CONTENT / VIDEO

Life-course vaccination – leave no one behind

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By MSD

Vaccination: A life-long approach



This animation was developed by The Health Policy Partnership and CLCI with the support of MSD. Some elements are based on findings of a report developed through desk research and interviews with leading experts in the field of vaccination. The report and animation were initiated and funded by MSD. Experts involved in the development of the report were not paid for their time.

Video: <http://eurac.tv/9PN6>

Vaccination is unquestionably one of the most powerful and cost-effective public health measures available.

Despite this, vaccination remain undervalued and underutilised, and there are numerous challenges to optimal uptake of vaccines.

Adopting a life-course approach to vaccination may be a way forward. A life-course approach

has been advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a model of healthcare provision that would benefit both individuals and healthcare systems. It involves looking at health as a continuum through life: a dynamic and interconnected process, as opposed to rigid life stages.

Most of us know how important vaccination is for babies and children, but did you know that people can

benefit from vaccinations throughout their lives?

Vaccination can protect individuals depending on their Health, Age, Lifestyle or Occupation. For example, vaccination can benefit people with chronic health conditions at increased risk of complication due to infections or older people who may

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be at higher risk of infectious disease due to a weakened immune system. Ensuring parents are up to date with their vaccination status can protect new-borns until they're old enough for their own vaccines. People with certain jobs exposed to vaccine-preventable diseases can protect both them and the people they work with. More generally, high-vaccination rates protect communities, stopping diseases being passed on to people who cannot be vaccinated. This is known as "herd immunity".

Vaccines are one of the most cost/efficient investments for the National Health Systems (NHS). With growing pressures on public health expenses, vaccination policies represent a significant ally to protect population health and improve efficiency of healthcare systems. Healthcare systems should be even more focused on disease prevention through vaccinations, because prevention is a smart investment in terms of individual well-being and the improved efficiency of healthcare systems.

Taking a whole-society, life-course approach to vaccination may enable realisation of the full potential of vaccination and address some of the most significant threats to its success, over time.





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