

Adult vaccination strategies: Public policies and best practices

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Introduction

The history concerning adult vaccination strategies and committees reflects a growing acknowledgment of the importance of immunization throughout the lifespan and the need for concerted efforts to protect adults from Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs) and combat emerging health threats. The roundtable and subsequent position paper provide a platform and a baseline for stakeholders to collaborate and drive concrete action in promoting adult vaccination and preventing diseases, in particular respiratory diseases, on a global scale.

Statement

The importance of vaccines in terms of effectiveness within health systems is well established: they save millions of lives each year and are among the most cost-effective health interventions ever developed. But despite these great strides, people all over the world, no matter their age, still become seriously ill or even die from diseases that vaccines can help prevent. We should be aware of possible future pandemics, such as we experienced with COVID-19, prevent infections, combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and strengthen the healthcare systems against diseases, in particular respiratory diseases, which do not only affect children, but can have severe impact on adults as well. Those considerations are the reason why there remains an urgent need to reach patients not only when they are children but throughout the life cycle.

To enable impactful progress, there must be a global commitment to invest into vaccine development and immunization research as well as to improve immunization strategies and increase vaccination coverage worldwide. This roundtable is the perfect opportunity to continue to take concrete action on adult vaccination and more broadly on preventable respiratory diseases.

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Four key strategic priorities can be highlighted to contribute the improvement of immunization strategies and to protect adult against Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs):

1. Protect adults against VPDs through policies that prioritise, categorize and embed adult vaccination in national immunization plans
2. Improve transparent and distinct communication and thus increase awareness and education of citizens, healthcare professionals, and policy makers on the overall burden of VPDs and the benefits of adult immunization
3. Establish digital vaccination registries, routine vaccination and implement vaccination outside the GPs office (Pharmacy based immunisation, nurses, midwives, community health) to improve vaccination coverage rates (across the lifespan) and enable recalls and reminders
4. Use vaccines as a tool to prevent infections in order to fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

1. Protect adult against VPDs through policies that prioritise, categorize and embed adult vaccination in national immunisations plans

Healthcare is a priority across the world, but prevention and immunisation programmes still receive a relatively low level of investment. This is even more the case for adult vaccination: if most countries have implemented robust vaccination programmes for children, adult immunisation programmes have consistently lagged. This is insufficient to accommodate the needs of adults, especially in ageing populations, demonstrating the need for the implementation of stronger policies and effective immunization schedules.

- a) Build and strengthen comprehensive vaccine-preventable disease surveillance supported by strong and reliable public recommendation
- b) Establishment of clear recommendation about infectious seasonal disease awareness and prevention in national immunisation calendars (with a focus on VPDs, such as COVID, Influenza, RSV, Pertussis, Pneumococcal pneumonia in order to have a unified position on the issue throughout the world
- c) Strengthen health policies to provide appropriate catch-up vaccination across the life-course, using categorization of clearly defined age-groups or risk groups.
- d) Ensure sufficient funding to improve access and uptake of existing vaccines as well as faster inclusion of new vaccines

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2. Improve transparent and distinct communication and thus increase awareness and education of citizens, healthcare professionals, and policy makers on the overall burden of VPDs and the benefits of adult immunisation

To enable better vaccination coverage among adults, it is important to highlight its importance by showing the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases in the adult population. It is therefore necessary to improve the communication about prevention to increase the understanding of the benefits of adult immunisation because vaccine uptake among adults will increase with information, reminders and distinct explanations. Once it's achieved, it is necessary to ensure wide access to vaccination by training health professionals.

- a) Educational campaigns targeting adults as well as pre-service and in-service training programmes for all relevant HCPs to increase the understanding of the benefits of adult immunisation and the common side effects of each vaccine. New communication channels 4.0 should be included, as well as knowledge of communication and social science to support officially recognized recommendations made by physicians and researchers.
- b) Implementation of a lifelong approach by making adult vaccination a routine part of visits/consultations to HCPs for all adults, especially those 50 years and older and other risk groups, including pregnant women and immunocompromised adults. These groups should be well defined by age or risk group.
- c) Establish a regular and inter-institutional touchpoint with a large scope of healthcare professionals for immunisation across the life-course and to inform and to facilitate access to vaccination opportunities. Here tasks should be defined for researchers, physicians, pharmacists, nurses, communication scientists, social scientists and politicians in an efficient cooperation.
- d) Centralize and improve available information resources from international and national public health authorities to avoid confusion and encourage adult vaccination by including information on the underrecognized role of adolescents and adults in disease transmission

3. Establish digital vaccination registries, routine vaccination and implement vaccination outside the GPs office (Pharmacy based immunisation, nurses, midwives, community health) to improve vaccination coverage rates (across the lifespans) and enable recalls and reminders

While immunization is one of the most successful public health interventions, coverage has plateaued over the last decade. The establishment of digital vaccination registries can help to improve vaccination coverage rates by allowing healthcare professionals to have access to health

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data and to evaluate its uptake across borders and, therefore, have the necessary information to vaccinate the population more widely, clarify vaccine-time-periods and avoid missed vaccination opportunities. Moreover, allowing them to have access to a patient's up-to-date health data can help them provide more efficient, higher quality, safer and more personalised care.

- a) Increase efficiency in terms of large-scale vaccination and achieve an optimal vaccination coverage rate by expanding and improving e-vaccination cards and national registries to adult vaccines. The better centralized and completed the available data is, the better it can be used for prevention
- b) Enable pharmacy-based immunisation to diversify vaccination pathways and improve convenience and accessibility;
- c) Enable nurses, pharmacists, midwives and community healthcare workers to vaccinate
- d) Setting country-specific targets and milestones to achieve an optimal global immunization coverage rate
- e) Ensuring that shared and on national level centralized health data includes vaccination coverage rate to enable healthcare professionals to access a patient's history across borders thus increasing the evidence base for decision on treatment and diagnosis
- f) Enable pharmacies to collect and share valuable data with governmental health authorities.

4. Use vaccines as a tool to prevent infections in order to fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

In 2019, AMR has been identified by the World Health Organization as one the top 10 health threats that the world is currently facing. AMR threatens to undermine the effectiveness of antimicrobials and partially undo progress made against infectious diseases. Microbes that are less susceptible to the drug are more likely to survive, and in so doing will pass that trait to their progeny, and to be spread to other persons. Unless current trends are reversed, many more pathogens will become resistant to first-line antibiotics. Thanks to their role in preventing infections, vaccines can help to fight this resistance.

- a) Improve awareness and understanding of the role of vaccines in limiting AMR through effective communication, education, and training, by explaining their two main benefits:
 - Vaccines prevent infections and contribute to reduce antimicrobial use
 - Vaccines that reduce the incidence of syndromic diseases may also reduce antibiotic use
- b) Expanding and sharing knowledge of vaccine on AMR by developing estimates of vaccine value to avert the full public health and socioeconomic burden of AMR
- c) Enhance surveillance systems to link vaccination data with antimicrobial use and resistance data by improving and increasing analysis of relevant data to assess vaccine impact on AMR

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Conclusions

1. Adult vaccination is a critical component of public health strategies. The roundtable and the position paper highlight the urgent need to prioritize adult vaccination and integrate it into national immunization plans. Recognizing that adults, regardless of age, are susceptible to vaccine-preventable diseases, concerted efforts should be made to strengthen policies, surveillance systems, and funding to ensure effective immunization programs for adults.
2. Communication and education play a vital role in increasing adult vaccination rates. The position paper emphasizes the importance of transparent and distinct communication to raise awareness among both citizens and healthcare professionals about the burden of vaccine-preventable diseases and the benefits of adult immunization. Educational campaigns, training programs, and centralized information resources are key elements in empowering individuals to make informed decisions and improving vaccination coverage.
3. Digital vaccination registries are crucial for improving vaccination coverage rates and ensuring efficient healthcare delivery. The establishment of digital registries allows for better access to patient health data, enabling healthcare professionals to provide targeted vaccinations, recall reminders, and personalized care. The integration of such systems and the inclusion of pharmacies as data collection points can contribute to optimal vaccination coverage across the lifespan.
4. Vaccines have a significant role in fighting antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The position paper highlights the link between vaccines and reducing the need for antimicrobial use, ultimately helping to combat AMR. Raising awareness about this connection, expanding knowledge on the value of vaccines in averting the burden of AMR, and enhancing surveillance systems can contribute to a comprehensive approach in addressing this global health threat.
5. Collaboration and global commitment are essential to improving adult vaccination strategies. The roundtable and the position paper serve as important platforms for stakeholders from various sectors to come together and discuss best practices, policies, and innovative solutions. With a shared goal of protecting adults from vaccine-preventable diseases and promoting public health, ongoing collaboration among researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and organizations is crucial to achieving meaningful progress in adult immunization.

References:

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