

VACCINATION PROGRAMMES & HEALTH SYSTEMS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Opinion by the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health (EXPH)




Vaccination is recognised as one of the most cost-effective public health interventions. However, the EU is facing increasing outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases.

WHY ARE VACCINATION RATES DECREASING?


There are several psychological, social, and contextual factors that affect the decision by a parent not to vaccinate their child.

KEY OBSTACLES TO VACCINATION COVERAGE INCLUDE:


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1. concerns or fears about vaccine safety and side effects,
 2. lack of trust,
 3. social norms,
 4. exposure to rumours and myths undermining confidence in vaccines,
 5. access barriers,
 6. failure to understand the underlying mechanisms that decrease vaccination confidence.

WHAT ARE THE PANEL'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE VACCINATION COVERAGE?

There is a range of policy options that countries can implement to increase vaccination coverage.



+ **Communication strategies** about the benefits of vaccination remain important but need to be combined with opportunities for **participatory** approaches enabling **dialogue** with vaccine hesitant and hard to reach groups. These strategies need to be targeted not only at the uninformed (i.e. the lack of information) but also at the misinformed (when the information is incorrect) or disinformed (when information is spread with the intention to deceive).



+ Achieving **herd immunity** should guide the design of policies. Vaccination can be mandatory or recommended as long as **high coverage** rates to achieve **herd immunity** are obtained. Depending on the institutional and political context, a policy option may be to allow individuals to opt out of vaccination subject to a process (to be defined and designed by the country) that ensures that individuals and parents are fully aware of the risk of not being covered. This however can be pursued only if vaccination coverage levels are sufficiently high to ensure herd immunity, which should remain the priority.

+ **Primary care** is well positioned to improve child vaccination rates given the trust held by doctors and the frequent interactions with parents and children. These can be used to raise awareness. Reminder systems for providers and parents have also proved successful.

+ Better access can be achieved by improving availability of vaccines from other providers (e.g., community pharmacists, nurses, community care providers, and other qualified providers including within schools) subject to having received appropriate training, and outside normal working hours. This **diversity in provision** is important in relation to reaching out to remote or underserved areas.

+ If coverage rates are low, the cost of being immunised should be reduced as low as possible, ideally making vaccination free of charge.

+ There is a rationale for **improved coordination and consistency** across EU countries on issues such as vaccines list and schedules, and decision tools for prioritization, including health technology appraisal and an evidence-based approach.

+ There is scope for strengthening the monitoring and the **surveillance** systems to ensure up-to-date data to guide policy and planning at a regional, country and sub-national level that will optimise coverage and impact. This could be achieved with integrated data systems.

+ **Equitable access** to vaccination needs to be ensured especially for hard-to-reach, marginalized and disadvantaged population groups, including migrants.

About the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health

The Expert Panel's mission is to provide sound and independent advice in the form of opinions in response to questions (mandates) submitted by the Commission on matters related to health care. The opinions of the Expert Panel present the views of the independent scientists who are members of the Expert Panel. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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