

Annual Meeting of the Coalition for Vaccination 2022

20 May 2022, 10:00-17:00

Minutes

Participants

Coalition co-chairs: (CPME), (EFN), (PGEU)

Coalition Member Associations: European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP), European Association of Senior Hospital Physicians (AEMH), European Dental Students' Association (EDSA), European Junior Doctors (EJD), European Medical Students' Association (EMSA), European Midwives Association (EMA), European Nursing Student Association (ENSA), European Pharmaceutical Students' Association (EPSA), European Specialist Nurses Organisations (ESNO), European Union of General Practitioners (UEMO), European Council of Medical Orders (CEOM)

Coalition Associated Organisations: Active Citizen Network, EuroHealthNet, European Hospital and Healthcare Federation, European Institute of Women's Health, European Public Health Association, Federation of European Academies of Medicines, ThinkYoung, Vienna Vaccine Safety Initiative

IMMUNION project

European Joint Action on Vaccination

European Commission

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

Meeting

The Coalition for Vaccination Annual Meeting 2022 was the first time in two years that the Coalition had the opportunity to meet physically. Last time was in March 2020. This year's meeting was dedicated to further involvement of students' associations in the Coalition's activities.

Morning session

CMPE opened the meeting stating that vaccination is currently more challenged and useful than ever before. He recalled that the Coalition was convened by the Commission in 2019 on the basis of the Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases from 2018. So far, the Coalition has met 6 times (at Annual Meetings and other meetings), and there are 18 core members and 10 associated organisations. It is being co-chaired by CPME, PGEU and EFN. EDSA was welcomed as a new member. The representative of the co-chairs also outlined the Coalition's activities since its last (virtual) meeting in October 2021. For autumn/winter 2021-22, the Coalition launched a joint "flu statement", recommending healthcare professionals and patients to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza, and developed a flu vaccination communication toolkit for use by its members. In April 2022, the Coalition supported the European Immunization Week,

highlighting the need to get routine vaccination back on track after the pandemic, reminding about the COVID-19 booster shots, and calling for easy access to vaccination services for the refugee populations from Ukraine. He also emphasised that healthcare professionals should lead as an example and get vaccinated. Concerning the evolution of the Coalition in the near future, there will be many activities linked to the IMMUNION project, which is currently entering its second and last year.

The European Commission intervened in the opening session, stating that Europe, since the Coalition met physically last time in March 2020, had been hit by the pandemic of a century. He stressed that healthcare professionals have been the ones keeping health systems up and running, and thanked them, as Director for Public Health in the European Commission, warmly for their efforts. The representative then highlighted that the Coalition is also still up and running, thanks to the co-chairs' and members' commitment. The Coalition plays a key role in addressing vaccine scepticism, and it helps bridging the knowledge gap between the public and the scientific community. The Coalition has, in this way, supported the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in Europe, the largest vaccination rollout ever, made possible by the EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines. He then stressed that Europe is going towards a European Health Union, to be more prepared for future health crises. In terms of vaccination, there are challenges ahead as we may need to explain to the public that routine administration of two vaccines – one against seasonal influenza; one against COVID-19 – could be useful. What matters is a life-course perspective on vaccination, also in the light of the inflow of Ukrainian refugees to EU Member States. The Commission can put the Coalition in more frequent contact with ECDC and the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The Commission here made the link to the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, in the context of which the Commission will present a proposal for a Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers. The Commission will keep the Coalition updated. Lastly, the Commission's recent proposal for a European Health Data Space was introduced, which will make health data, including vaccination data, widely available for healthcare professionals and patients, for health purposes.

EMSA and EPSA took the floor, presenting two initiatives launched by the Coalition's students' associations. The first of these initiatives is called "Assessing Vaccination Status Amongst Incoming Refugees in Europe from a Health Professionals' Perspective" in the context of which students will interview healthcare professionals working with the refugee populations from Ukraine on the basis of question blocks about e.g. vaccination status and readiness to be vaccinated. The project is still in its preparatory phase, and interviews have not started yet.

The other initiative concerns a Vaccination Ambassador Course, following up on various surveys showing that students lack training on vaccination, both in terms of vaccinology ("hard skills") and communication ("soft skills"). An online training programme is foreseen, and the idea is that participants can receive a diploma signed by the Coalition.

Coalition Members and Associated Organisations congratulated the students on these initiatives and expressed their willingness to support. It was, however, also highlighted that duplication with activities in IMMUNION and/or the European Joint Action on Vaccination should be avoided.

The representative from the Joint Action intervened with a short presentation on how young healthcare professionals could benefit from activities in the European Joint Action on

Vaccination, which officially ended on 31 March 2022. He highlighted, in particular this joint action's barometer to evaluate training needs for vaccination, its curriculum on vaccinology for health professionals and students, and its activities on vaccine hesitancy, identifying EU Member States' actions to address this, and monitoring vaccine confidence online.

This led to a discussion about training needs and the needs for simple, consistent messaging to people with questions and concerns about vaccination.

ECDC provided an update on their actions to support EU Member States with low uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. The activities ran from October 2021 to February 2022. ECDC had bilateral dialogues with 11 Member States and held technical webinars for all these Member States in view of promoting COVID-19 vaccination through social media and community engagement. With the support of the Coalition, ECDC also held tailored webinars for health professionals (various professions) in Estonia, Bulgaria, and Romania. ECDC also provided an overview of EU resources for healthcare professionals working with Ukrainian refugees, including in relation to vaccination.

Afternoon session

The IMMUNION project consortium provided a state of play of the IMMUNION project, which has the purpose of strengthening the Coalition. IMMUNION has currently been running for one year, meaning that it is halfway through its project period. The project is on track. In her intervention, the representative focused on how IMMUNION can support the Coalition's students' associations, by 1) centralising resources, 2) providing training and workshops, and 3) amplifying their work. IMMUNION will have its final General Assembly and Conference in February 2023.

This led to yet another discussion about training needs. It was also highlighted that a special effort is needed to ensure the sustainability of vaccination projects.

The meeting now went into a large discussion slot, chaired by PGEU, and based on guiding questions sent to the Coalition in advance:

1. What are the latest vaccination related news from your organisation?
2. What could your organisation do to support healthcare students in the field on vaccination?
3. Has your organisation been involved in efforts to support healthcare professionals in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries?
4. What could/should the Coalition do together next?
5. How much attention does COVID-19 vaccination still needs?

Two of the questions – question 2 and 4 – generated plenty of discussion. Concerning question 2, the students' associations stated that they have the resources to promote vaccination but need guidance on what to do to avoid duplication. They expressed satisfaction that they are now being listened to. Concerning question 4, several associations supported the idea of making a joint statement and a big joint-campaign, e.g. a 'back-to-school' campaign about any school-related vaccines. Moreover, it was suggested that there could be more partnership working on sub-projects and campaigns, further collaboration on social media between members and

associate members, and sharing of free training materials across websites/portals to allow healthcare professionals to have access to as much useful information as possible. Also, it was proposed that the Coalition would advocate for catchup vaccinations, to fill the gaps in coverage with recommended vaccines having developed due to pandemic related circumstances, particularly in children and adolescents.

The large discussion slot had an intermezzo by ECDC, who, on the basis of experience made by the SciComm Collective (Ireland), presented the perspective of young healthcare professionals acting as social media ambassadors/influencers. The topic will also be discussed in this year's meeting of the ECDC National Focal Points for Communication.

This led to a discussion of the importance of such social media interventions by young healthcare professionals, but also about the risks of being present online in this way.

EFN wrapped up the meeting, thanking warmly the Coalition co-chairs, the Coalition, including students' association and the SANTE. She highlighted the importance of life-course vaccination, and the vaccination-related perspectives of the Cancer Plan and the European Health Data Space. She praised the students' interventions and stressed the value of life-long learning and substantial curricula for all – pre- and post-graduate. She finally highlighted the importance of being present where people are, and of partnership and collaboration as the way forward.