

## COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 22 December 2009

### on seasonal influenza vaccination

(Text with EEA relevance)

(2009/1019/EU)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 168(6) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) Seasonal influenza is a contagious viral disease which occurs as epidemic during the winter months in Europe. It is one of the most significant and commonly occurring communicable diseases and is an important source of morbidity and mortality in all Member States.
- (2) In some cases, complications go beyond a self-limiting respiratory infection and result in severe pneumonia or other secondary complications with a sometimes fatal outcome. These complications occur far more commonly among older age groups and among people with chronic medical conditions.
- (3) Seasonal influenza can be mitigated through vaccination but the virus frequently changes its antigenic composition and, therefore, vaccine composition is reviewed regularly by the World Health Organisation (WHO) expert groups.
- (4) The 2003 World Health Assembly adopted Resolution 56.19 to increase influenza vaccination coverage of all people at high risk with the goal of attaining vaccination coverage of at least 50 % of the older age groups of the population by 2006 and 75 % by 2010.
- (5) On 26 October 2005 and 14 June 2006 the European Parliament adopted resolutions entitled 'Strategy against an influenza pandemic' and 'Pandemic influenza preparedness and response planning in the European Community' respectively, calling on the Member States to increase influenza vaccination in line with WHO recommendations. Those resolutions also urged Member States to increase vaccination coverage during the inter-pandemic period in accordance with WHO recommendations.
- (6) Therefore, concerted action at the level of the European Union should be taken to mitigate the impact of seasonal influenza by encouraging vaccination among risk groups and healthcare workers. The purpose of this Recommendation is to reach the target of 75 % vaccination coverage of the older age groups recommended by the WHO as early as possible and preferably by the 2014-2015 winter season. This target of 75 % should, if possible, be extended to the risk group of people with chronic conditions, taking into account the guidance issued by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).
- (7) Increased vaccination rates among risk groups would also contribute to higher vaccination rates in general, including of healthcare workers.
- (8) To bring about these changes, a necessary first step is that all participants of the healthcare environment, risk groups, healthcare workers, physicians, healthcare managers and policymakers are informed of the problem of seasonal influenza through public and professional awareness campaigns. Healthcare workers should be made aware of the particular danger faced by their more vulnerable patients. Healthcare workers should also be made aware of their responsibility to give the appropriate advice on vaccination to their patients.
- (9) It is, in particular, essential to gather specific and comparable data at national level regarding the uptake rates in risk groups in order to assess properly the situation in all the Member States. Until now such data has not always been available. Based on this data the Commission and the Member States will be able to share information and best practices with third countries through the existing channels of international cooperation in the field of health.
- (10) Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 establishing a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control <sup>(1)</sup> (ECDC) in particular entrusts the ECDC with the mission to provide technical and scientific expertise to the Commission and to the Member States. The ECDC also operates the dedicated network established for the surveillance of seasonal influenza in accordance with Commission Decision 2000/96/EC of 22 December 1999 on the communicable diseases to be progressively covered by the Community network under Decision No 2119/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(2)</sup>. The ECDC should therefore assist the Member States in providing scientific expertise on seasonal influenza vaccination.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 142, 30.4.2004, p. 1.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 28, 3.2.2000, p. 50.

(11) In the context of seasonal influenza vaccination the objective to reach 75 % vaccination coverage of the older age groups, recommended by the WHO, will clearly be facilitated by concerted action at the level of the European Union,

HAS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATION:

1. Member States are encouraged to adopt and implement national, regional or local action plans or policies, as appropriate, aimed at improving seasonal influenza vaccination coverage, with the aim of reaching, as early as possible and preferably by the 2014-2015 winter season, a vaccination coverage rate of 75 % for 'older age groups' and, if possible, for other risk groups referred to in point 2(a), if not already reached. Member States are also encouraged to improve vaccination coverage among healthcare workers.

The action plans or policies should take into account the gaps identified at national level and organise the activities referred to in point 2(b) and (c).

2. In the framework of the action plans or policies referred to in point 1, Member States are encouraged to:

(a) take into account the definition of 'older age groups' and of 'risk groups' as contained in the guidance issued by the ECDC;

(b) measure uptake in all risk groups, and to analyse the reasons why some people do not wish to receive vaccinations;

(c) foster education, training, and information exchange on seasonal influenza and vaccination by organising:

(i) information action for healthcare workers;

(ii) information action for risk groups and their families regarding the risks associated with, and the prevention of, influenza;

(iii) effective information action to remove obstacles to vaccination uptake.

3. Member States are encouraged to report on a voluntary basis to the Commission on the implementation of this Recommendation, in particular, on the coverage achieved among risk groups.

4. The Commission is invited to report regularly to the Council on the implementation of this Recommendation, on the basis of the data the Member States will make available.

5. The Commission is invited to continue to support research on influenza through the Research Framework Programmes.

Done at Brussels, 22 December 2009.

*For the Council*

*The President*

A. CARLGREN