

## Vaccination could provide EU citizens with healthier lives for longer if implemented throughout life, says new report

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Over 14,000 people contracted measles in the EU in 2017<sup>1</sup> – three times more than in 2016. Human Papillomavirus, a vaccine preventable infection, is also responsible for 53,000 cases of cancer in the EU every year that is affecting both women and men.<sup>2</sup> Influenza and Invasive Pneumococcal Infections are among the top of the list in burden of disease in the elderly population.<sup>3</sup>

In a report published this week, leading civil society organisations in Brussels, supported by some of the world's leading experts in vaccination have called for EU policymakers to shift towards a life-course approach to vaccination.

The report, titled "[A life-course approach to vaccination: adapting European policies](#)", argues that when vaccination policies are segmented by age only, which is what currently prevails across the EU, they are not able to achieve their full potential to prevent life threatening diseases and best protect populations. Yet risks of infectious diseases exist at any age and depend also on the individuals' health status, lifestyle or occupation.

The report comes at a crucial time given the growing evidence of the benefits of vaccine preventable diseases within the EU and because of the recently generated policy momentum.

- The European Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on vaccination, which came out last week, stresses that a life-course approach to immunisation should feature heavily in national vaccination plans, and proposes routine checks and regular opportunities to vaccinate everyone across all stages of life.
- The European Parliament's own-initiative report on vaccine hesitancy, passed in plenary a fortnight ago, also calls for Member States to "*ensure that vaccine coverage is extended beyond early childhood, and that all population groups can be included in a lifelong vaccination approach.*"
- The issue will now be high on the Council's agenda, and Member States should adopt a life-course approach to vaccination, in order to ensure a future-proof approach to vaccination policy.

The experts behind the report insist that EU policymakers must take the following five steps for change:

1. **Leadership from the top.** EU and national public health leaders should advocate a life-course approach to vaccination, giving a clear mandate to regional and local authorities.
2. **Changing the public's perception of vaccination,** for example through education from an early age to overcome vaccine hesitancy and improve health literacy.
3. **Engaging healthcare professionals** to help rebuild public confidence in vaccination and encourage optimal coverage of existing vaccines.
4. **Integrating vaccination into non-healthcare settings, such as schools or workplaces,** to encourage vaccination throughout all stages of life, including adulthood.
5. **Improving surveillance, data and research on the impact of vaccination across the life-course** to build a compelling model.

Along with the publication of the report, the authors have also sent [an open letter](#) to Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis, as well as other officials of the Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE).

The open letter outlines the policy recommendations detailed in the report, calling for policymakers to promote public awareness campaigns, provide healthcare professionals with the tools and skills to discuss the benefits of a life-course approach with patients, integrate vaccination into non-healthcare settings such as schools and workplaces, and importantly, invest in more surveillance through effective immunisation information systems, data and research.

The report's authors call on all stakeholders to come together to implement concerted actions to ensure vaccination achieves its potential for future generations in Europe.

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### **About the report**

This report, "A life-course approach to vaccination: adapting European policies", was drafted by The Health Policy Partnership, based on desk research and interviews with leading experts in the field of vaccination. The development of the report was initiated and funded by MSD. Experts were not paid for their time.

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### **References**

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