

EAHP Opinion on Vaccination

4 March 2019

- EAHP welcomes the Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Education of healthcare workers is crucial to protect patients in need of acute care.
- The growing vaccine shortage problem should be addressed at European level through an investigation into the causes and through the provision of solutions for preventable shortages.

The European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) fully supports the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases which was adopted in December 2018.

As outlined in the Council Recommendation, healthcare workers play a crucial role in working towards the goal of improved vaccination coverage. Patients, visitors and healthcare workers who are not vaccinated can spread infections such as measles or the flu to very ill patients in our hospitals. Vaccinations reduce, for us all, the need to be admitted to the hospital for the treatment of preventable illnesses. To protect patients who find themselves in critical health situations and to help ourselves stay healthy, hospital pharmacists recommend vaccination wherever possible.

Healthcare workers have an increased risk of contracting infections at work and thus further transmitting them to colleagues and patients. Vaccinated healthcare workers are not only protecting themselves but they also act as a barrier against the spread of infections. One might say it is the ethical duty of every healthcare worker to get vaccinated and should be compulsory, unless contraindicated.

An investment is also needed in the education and training of healthcare workers, in particular in the hospital sector where patients in acute situations are cared for. To ensure adequate levels of patient and healthcare workers safety training on vaccine-preventable diseases, vaccinology and immunisation should be strengthened at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. Consequently, EAHP calls on national governments to offer healthcare workers opportunities for continuing education and training on vaccination.

Vaccine hesitancy, especially that influenced by misconceptions that still exist and prevent parents from vaccinating their children, is a concern to EAHP. Consequently, the Association welcomes the European Commission's intention to counter online vaccine misinformation and develop evidence-based information tools and guidance to support Member States in responding to increased rates of vaccine hesitancy.

As indicated in the Council Recommendation, vaccine shortages have direct consequences for the delivery and implementation of national vaccination programmes. The 2018 Medicines Shortages Survey Report¹ of the EAHP identified preventative medicines – such as vaccines – as the second highest reported medication in shortage in the hospital setting. In 2018, 43% of participating hospital pharmacists from 38 different European countries underlined shortages problems with vaccines for Hepatitis B, Pneumococcal, Tuberculosis, Tetanus and Hepatitis A.

Reports on the shortage of preventative medicines increased since EAHP's last survey in 2014² by 13%. Consequently, the EAHP would like to encourage all European institutions to tackle the growing problem of vaccine shortages. In particular, an investigation into the factors causing medicines shortages should be initiated and solutions in solving preventable shortages should be provided. European level coordination is especially crucial in the first half of 2019 since new regulations aiming at combating counterfeit drugs and Brexit might impact the availability of medicines such as vaccines.

1. EAHP, Medicines Shortages in European Hospitals - Results of the largest pan-European survey on medicines shortages in the hospital sector, an overview of the situation and the key challenges that need to be tackled, November 2018, available at: http://www.eahp.eu/sites/default/files/report_medicines_shortages2018.pdf [1]
2. EAHP, Medicines Shortages in European Hospitals – The evidence and case for action, Results of the largest pan-European survey on medicines supply shortages in the hospital sector, its prevalence, nature and impacts for patient care, available at: http://www.eahp.eu/sites/default/files/shortages_report05online.pdf [2]

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Links

[1] http://www.eahp.eu/sites/default/files/report_medicines_shortages2018.pdf [2]

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