

The European Scientific Working group on Influenza (ESWI) is a multidisciplinary group of key opinion leaders in the field combating the impact of epidemic and pandemic influenza in Europe. Raising awareness and stimulating interaction between all influenza stakeholders in Europe are ESWI's most crucial tools to reach this objective.

**Policy makers play a crucial part in controlling influenza.** Of course, influenza is but one of the many threats to public health they are confronted with, but it certainly deserves **special attention**. After all, next to the annual influenza epidemics, there is the constant threat of a pandemic, potentially claiming millions of lives worldwide. ESWI therefore recognizes the need for straightforward and tailor-made information to policy makers. To demonstrate ESWI's commitment, you will (continue to) receive this newsletter twice a year. It aims **to inform you about all relevant evolutions in the influenza field** and to provide you with the necessary background information about the disease.

A pinnacle of ESWI's activities is the organisation of the Third European Influenza Conference, with its special programme for policy makers. More on this conference is to be read on the next page of this newsletter and in the enclosed second announcement.



*This issue of ESWI's Influenza Newsletter to Policy Makers welcomes all new readers and informs you about*

- *the aims of the European Scientific Working group on Influenza*
- *the special policy makers' programme at the upcoming Third European Influenza Conference*
- *the drivers and barriers for influenza vaccination in 11 European countries*

## INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

*When a new influenza virus appears, against which the human population has no immunity, it may result in several, simultaneous epidemics worldwide with enormous numbers of deaths and illnesses: an influenza pandemic.*

### BE PREPARED

Methods of controlling influenza rely on vaccines and antiviral agents. **Based on inter-pandemic use of both vaccines and antiviral agents, current supply is both insufficient and unequally distributed.** As a pandemic influenza vaccine is essentially a new vaccine, it would take between 6 and 12 months before any vaccine became available.

Implementation of appropriate measures at

national and international levels, as advocated by the World Health Organization and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, requires heightened awareness on the part of all players involved.

**Therefore, the Third ESWI Conference provides an attractive opportunity for you to find out everything you need to know about influenza, in a special programme for government representatives.**



THE BEST WAY TO  
PREPARE FOR AN  
**INFLUENZA PANDEMIC**  
IS PUTTING THE  
INFRASTRUCTURE,  
AGREEMENTS AND  
PROCEDURES IN PLACE  
TO DEAL WITH **ANNUAL**  
**INFLUENZA EPIDEMICS.**

# THE THIRD EUROPEAN INFLUENZA CONFERENCE: A TAILOR-MADE PROGRAMME TRACK FOR POLICY MAKERS



VILAMOURA | PORTUGAL | 14-17 SEPTEMBER 2008

*The public health burden of epidemic influenza and the potentially devastating impact of pandemic influenza emphasize the need for European governments to develop and implement pandemic preparedness plans in order to protect European citizens from a public health scourge. To focus the minds of governments and policy makers, ESWI invites European public health officials to attend the tailor-made sessions and workshops at the Third European Influenza Conference in Vilamoura, Portugal.*

ESWI acknowledges the fact that policy making is a question of priorities and that the information about influenza may not always be straightforward to governmental authorities. In clearly delineated sessions, the ins and outs of influenza prevention and control will therefore be presented by peers. After all, best practice does exist and all countries can learn from the experience of others adapting

necessary components to national practices, infrastructure and culture.

All sessions offer plenty opportunities for discussion and interaction. The Third European Influenza Conference is therefore a unique and appealing chance to learn everything about influenza one needs to know in order to make proper decisions.



**All information on the conference venue, the policy makers' programme, the accommodation and registration procedure is to be found on [www.eswiconference.org](http://www.eswiconference.org).**



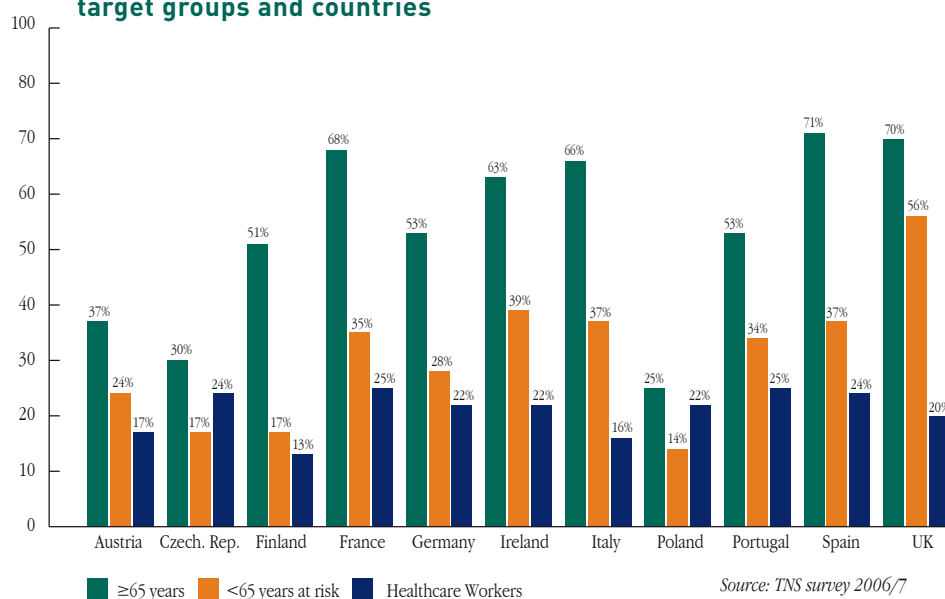
# THE GAP BETWEEN VACCINATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE ACTUAL VACCINATION RATES

Influenza is a serious and dangerous disease. Influenza vaccines are a safe and effective way to prevent serious illness and death. Both facts are well documented in the medical literature and widely recognized by scientists and policy makers.

Many national governments therefore issue guidelines, recommending influenza vaccination for the elderly (over 60 or 65 years of age), people

suffering from a chronic illness and individuals working in the medical field. The Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, conducted random interviews to analyse and determine the level of influenza vaccination coverage in 11 European countries in the 2006/07 season. The study revealed a substantial gap between vaccination recommendations and the actual vaccination rates.

## Vaccination coverage rates differ widely across key target groups and countries



The study shows that influenza vaccine coverage needs to be improved in all recommended target groups:

- **Elderly** coverage in some countries must be increased to meet the WHO objective,
- Coverage of **at-risk under 65s** is considerably lower than in the elderly and should be improved,
- Coverage amongst **healthcare workers** is extremely low. Yet it has been demonstrated that vaccination of healthcare workers in long term care results in indirect protection of patients who are at high-risk for influenza.

Healthcare workers therefore could be said to have a moral duty to protect others by protecting themselves.



## INFLUENZA VACCINATION RECOMMENDATIONS IN EUROPE

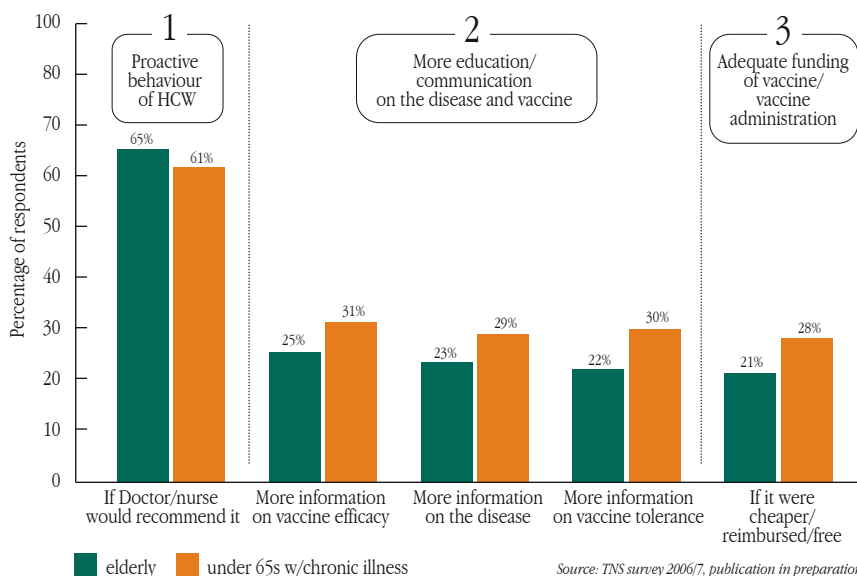
- The elderly: generally from 65 years of age upwards
- Chronic illness sufferers: all people under the age-defined limit suffering from cardiovascular, respiratory, metabolic and/or renal disease & the immuno-compromised
- Healthcare Workers

## WHO VACCINATION COVERAGE RATE OBJECTIVES FOR THE ELDERLY

As determined by the World Health Organisation and supported by the European Parliament:

- 50% by 2006
- 75% by 2010

Three key drivers would improve vaccination coverage



Three key drivers have been identified to achieve higher vaccination coverage:

1. Encourage healthcare workers to proactively recommend vaccination to their at-risk patients,
2. Implement wide & effective public communication and education campaigns on influenza and influenza vaccines,

3. Support vaccination by providing adequate funding.

As a patient's first point of contact and medical adviser, healthcare workers play a crucial part in the fight against influenza. Efforts should therefore be made at national and international levels to dramatically enhance the coverage rate in this target group.

MANDATORY VACCINATION OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS?

The vaccination of healthcare workers is a proven means to indirectly protect patients against influenza. Furthermore, influenza can have a disrupting effect on the continuity of care. Research has shown that vaccinating the personnel reduces influenza infections and therefore fewer working days are lost. On these grounds some organisations (Dutch Society for Nursing Home Physicians, Health Council of the Netherlands) recommend influenza vaccination of healthcare workers. In 2003, the World Health Organization officially welcomed the initiatives of countries to administer influenza vaccination to healthcare personnel.

In spite of these recommendations, the uptake of influenza vaccination among HCWs is generally low, as shown in the chart on the previous page.

One may therefore ask whether it is necessary and morally justifiable to defend a mandatory vaccination programme.

Such a mandatory policy, however, raises several ethical problems. Up till now a clear statement on the ethics of mandatory influenza vaccination for healthcare workers is lacking. Yet such a statement would be a tremendous help for professional organisations advising on the issue. Therefore, the European Scientific Working group on Influenza has brought together an international group of ethicists, experienced in public health ethics, to write a position statement on the ethics of influenza vaccination for healthcare workers, both in hospital settings and in nursing homes. The document will be available on [www.eswi.org](http://www.eswi.org) soon.

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