



VACCINES: SAVING LIVES AT EVERY AGE

FULL STATEMENT

Living longer can provide significant positive opportunities both for individuals and society;(1) yet, without good health and the ability to do what is valued, growing older can be a double-edged sword. Disease prevention is a vital pillar of sound public health strategies that brings with it significant social and economic benefits particularly in the field of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs).

Historically, the prevention of infectious diseases through immunization has had an important societal effect vastly reducing the risk of disability and/or death from polio, measles, influenza, pertussis and pneumonia. Notwithstanding this progress, VPDs remain a cause of morbidity and mortality throughout the life span,(2) especially within specific risk groups including young children, pregnant women, older individuals and people with chronic conditions.

While uptake rates are high for many vaccines, coverage is still too low to prevent the spread of highly-infectious diseases. This suggests poor awareness of the medium and long-term impacts of VPDs on the health and functional ability of individuals, families, and communities.

There is a need for enhanced public health promotion of vaccination in adulthood in addition to that of childhood as part of a healthy ageing strategy that begins before a person is deemed "older". This is also of importance within at-risk groups where immunization targets are not currently being met.

The life course approach to vaccination supports a person-centred approach to health at all ages and aims to reach undervaccinated populations, drawing attention to the individual and population consequences of infectious disease and ensuring equitable access.

Existing barriers to vaccination pose challenges to global vaccine advocacy, hindering efforts to increase uptake rates and improve community protection against infectious diseases. One such barrier is the inconsistent narrative around vaccination as a vital disease prevention strategy. Healthcare professionals (HCPs) are called upon to discuss vaccines and advocate for vaccination with patients as a way of preserving health, especially with those who are at increased risk of complications. This makes consistent narrative from HCPs critical to successful vaccine uptake.

There is also a lack of recognition of VPDs as a public issue with resounding impact reaching beyond the individual. When healthy people choose not to be vaccinated, the ripple effects are felt throughout the community, disproportionately impacting those who are already vulnerable. This impact appears to be underappreciated, as many are not aware of the broader public health impacts of vaccination.

These and other enduring barriers are further complicated by vaccine apathy - inaction in being vaccinated despite the availability of services(3) - among the public and the HCPs that shape attitudes toward vaccination. This apathy threatens community protection against infectious diseases and jeopardizes the health of vulnerable populations.

(1) World Health Organization. "Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health (2016–2020)." (2016).

(2) Michel, Jean-Pierre, and Pierre Olivier Lang. "Promoting Life Course Vaccination." *Rejuvenation Research*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, pp. 75–81., doi:10.1089/rej.2010.1078.

(3) "Global Experts Call for Action on Vaccination Apathy, and More Protection for Older Adults Against Infectious Diseases." *AboutPharma, HPS World News*, 7 Nov. 2017, www.aboutpharma.com/blog/2017/11/07/global-experts-call-for-action-on-vaccination-apaty-and-more-protection-for-older-adults-against-infectious-diseases/.



WORLD IMMUNIZATION WEEK 2018

World Immunization Week 2018 is focused on "Protected Together, #VaccinesWork." The Alliance for Aging Research, the Coalition for Life-Course Immunisation, the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations, Generations United, Immunize Canada, the International Federation on Ageing, the International Longevity Centre – United Kingdom, and Vaccines Today work together to engage in advocacy on vaccination in various countries and regions of the world. These organizations raise awareness on a life course approach to vaccination, jointly combat declining vaccine coverage, vaccine hesitancy, and supply shortages, and help to influence methods of tracking vaccination coverage rates, both individually and collectively.

Taking into consideration these differences within and between countries, our organizations have agreed upon three key messages that continue to govern our work on life course vaccination, namely:

- Vaccination is central to a life course approach to healthy ageing;
- There is importance in vaccination beginning in childhood and continuing throughout life; and
- There needs to be greater focus on older people and at-risk groups around vaccination.

This World Immunization Week marks a milestone in organizations from different perspectives coming together to advocate for continued, strengthened investment in vaccination as an instrument of health and as an indicator of our collective drive to safeguard individuals' well-being and active participation in society at all ages.

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