

Overcoming Obstacles to Vaccination: Set of final recommendations

Designing effective vaccination programmes requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the multiple practical barriers hindering vaccine uptake: logistical, administrative, informational barriers and barriers linked to the limited availability of medical staff and services can represent a major obstacle towards achieving vaccination coverage targets.

Reminder schemes, mobile vaccination units, and school vaccination programmes can help lifting these barriers and increasing vaccine uptake.

The following recommendations provide a framework for refining vaccination strategies to make them more impactful and sustainable.

Reminder schemes

Reminder systems (SMS, email, digital notifications) help improving awareness of vaccination schedules, reducing forgetfulness, and addressing information barriers. They can also support the improvement of vaccination service supply, by making vaccine demand more predictable. Evidence from pilot reminder schemes implemented in Catalonia, Murcia, and Croatia shows statistically significant increases in vaccine coverage when reminders are sent. Key elements for the success of reminder schemes include:

- Integrating automatic reminder systems with administrative databases.
- Offering easy access to information materials, e.g. via links to official websites or mobile applications embedded in the reminder message.
- Using multilingual communication to ensure accessibility for linguistic minority groups.
- Engaging general practitioners in the reminder process, by providing them with tools to track their patients' vaccination status.

Mobile vaccination units

Mobile vaccination units can help overcoming geographical and convenience barriers by bringing vaccines closer to underserved or hard-to-reach communities, including rural or underserved urban areas. Pilot mobile units activated in Upper Austria and Skärholmen (Stockholm) obtained good results in engaging with vulnerable adolescents and elderly population. Lessons learned through the pilots indicate that the impact of mobile units can be strengthened by:

- Flexible opening hours, including non-conventional opening hours such as evenings and the weekends.
- Engaging with local communities through collaboration with community leaders, organisations and influencers.
- Involving multilingual healthcare professionals and providing information in multiple languages.
- Combining the offer of a range of vaccines with other relevant healthcare services.

School vaccination programmes

School vaccination programmes can improve vaccination coverage rates by reducing logistical and proximity barriers. The integration of vaccination sessions within regular school activities and school hours can minimise disruption of everyday routines for busy parents and ensure higher uptake. The pilot projects

implemented in Estonia and the Netherlands show that involving schools in vaccination awareness activities and moving vaccination premises closer to the school are associated with increased families' engagement, convenience and accessibility of vaccination services. The success of school vaccination programmes can be facilitated by:

- Engaging with parents, by providing them with clear and comprehensive information on the vaccination programme, explaining the benefits of vaccines, and addressing concerns on their safety.
- Streamlining processes, e.g. by using digital consent forms.
- Implementing targeted, age-appropriate and culturally sensitive communication strategies, including the development of information materials and the delivery of information and Q&A sessions.
- Collaborating with school nurses, teachers, and school administrators on different aspects of the vaccination programme.

Designing tailored and sustainable programmes

To develop vaccination programmes that are tailored to the needs of the target population and ensure buy-in, it is important that the programme design is supported by:

- A thorough needs assessment, to collect and organise evidence on specific needs and barriers faced by the target group.
- Building of an enabling environment through the involvement, consultation, and coordination with stakeholders (healthcare providers, institutions, organisations, community leaders), to ensure a unified approach.
- Engagement with community leaders, influencers and gate keepers to promote vaccination messages, help building trust, and address concerns within the communities.

Embedding new programmes in existing infrastructure and established routines, securing political and financial support, facilitating the involvement of local actors from the onset, and encouraging stakeholder ownership can help ensuring the sustainability of the practices beyond the pilot phase. Leveraging EU and cross-country support to organise structured mutual learning activities and benefit from exchange opportunities can facilitate innovation and enable transfers of innovative practices to different contexts.