



EUPHA fully supports the European Commission’s Roadmap to strengthen cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases

On 5 December, the European Commission published a roadmap on strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases. The roadmap is intended to prepare for a Council Recommendation on this topic.

Vaccination is one of the most powerful and effective public health interventions known. It has saved millions of lives and brought huge benefits to public and individual health. As a direct result, many infections that used to affect the most vulnerable, including children, have disappeared or are extremely rare. Scientific evidence of the beneficial effect of vaccines is overwhelming; there is unequivocal evidence going back decades that vaccines have been one of the major drivers of the decreasing burden of infectious diseases. Yet we in Europe cannot be complacent. Vaccination coverage with MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) is already too low in several countries in Europe, leading to outbreaks of measles, with cases in children needing hospitalisation or even dying. Everywhere, vaccine hesitancy threatens the achievement of sufficient vaccine coverage to protect populations from infections.

The European Public Health Association (EUPHA), a network of national associations of public health, representing around 20’000 public health professionals, wholeheartedly welcomes the European Commission’s roadmap on vaccine preventable diseases. EUPHA commits itself to promoting the use of vaccines as a key component of public health, emphasising the benefits and impact of vaccines on diseases that once posed a major threat to public and individual health and could do again, voicing concerns about the risk of re-emergence of vaccine preventable disease, and providing a platform for exchanging scientific knowledge and best practices. In this respect, EUPHA welcomes the initiative to strengthen cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases and acknowledges the importance of an EU-wide strategy aiming to achieve equal access to vaccines and vaccine delivery services, more alignment of (innovative) vaccine development initiatives, procurement and stockpiling, while effectively addressing concerns about vaccines.

In European countries, the problems of declining coverage, supply shortages and growing vaccine hesitancy are widely reported and this asks for European support to decrease the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases. What is needed:

- Messages on vaccination given to the population need to be evidence-based, clear and transparent. These messages should also address benefits, vaccination risks and fear of side effects. The public health professionals and the primary caregivers most certainly have an important role to play here.

- Research is needed to look at vaccination coverage in different population groups, including migrants and ethnic minorities, the reasons why there is vaccine hesitancy in certain population groups and also on the safety and further development of vaccines.
- Collaboration with all stakeholders, including the European citizens as well as the vaccine industry, is essential to ensure sufficient and safe access to vaccines.
- The public health community needs to step up its activities to provide strong interventions.

EUPHA believes that the consultation launched by the European Commission will reveal a wealth of opportunities to engage in an open dialogue about the proven benefits of vaccines and the concerns that are being raised in order to design joint strategies to prevent, prepare and respond to threats from vaccine preventable diseases, now and in the future. We invite all our members and partners to support this roadmap by reacting at: http://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2017-5925775_en.

Having a strong research-base, EUPHA will support the European Commission, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the World Health Organization (WHO) Europe and our national members by, amongst others, producing a European Journal of Public Health e-collection by January 2018. This e-collection on vaccination and vaccine hesitancy will present the evidence-base and include an editorial aimed at policymakers at all levels.

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