THE ORGANIZATION AND DELIVERY OF
VACCINATION SERVICES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

GREECE

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Greece

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Governance

Key agencies

According to the decision of the Ministry of Health (Υ1/ΓΠ 161682/2008), the National Immunization Committee is the body of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity that is responsible for advising on recommended vaccines. The Ministry determines the national vaccination programme, after the issuance of a joint ministerial decision by the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Labour and Social Security and the Minister of Health and Welfare.

The National Immunization Committee is responsible for recommendations on the drafting and updating of the national vaccination programme and vaccination recommendations for the general public. It is also responsible for providing vaccination recommendations regarding specific population groups and health professionals; for providing vaccination recommendations in the event of epidemics, pandemics and public health emergencies, including the setting of vaccination priorities; for the drafting of proposals for the development of population vaccination programmes in the country or for subgroups, and for the monitoring of their implementation; for the monitoring of epidemiological data on diseases prevented by vaccination; for taking measures to ensure the adequacy of vaccines and sera; and finally for the identification or modification of the technical specifications for vaccines and sera according to the specifications of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Vaccination programmes

In Greece, on the basis of systematic scientific documentation, epidemiological data and economic weighting, and taking into account the guidelines of WHO and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the child and adolescent vaccination programme and the adult vaccination programme are drawn up at the national level, and include and explain the timetable for all vaccines recommended to the general public and to groups at high risk. The national vaccination programme includes the vaccination plan for measles for children and for influenza for adults.

Vaccines included in the national vaccination programme are recommended but, in accordance with current legislation, sanctions are not imposed on those who do not want to be vaccinated or vaccinate their children. However, enrolment of pupils in kindergarten and primary school requires vaccination in accordance with the national vaccination programme, as shown on each pupil's health card (No. Φ.6/451/115136/Γ1/16-9-2010 circular of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs). Therefore the vaccination of children is becoming in a sense mandatory, with adult vaccination remaining recommended.

For **measles**, due to the recent epidemic outbreak in Greece, the National Immunization Committee, under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, has drawn up a circular recommending the immediate vaccination of children, adolescents and adults who have not been vaccinated. According to the national vaccination programme, children, adolescents and adults born after 1970 who have no history of the disease should be vaccinated with two doses of measles vaccine in the form of a monovalent measles vaccine or a trivalent MMR vaccine. In addition, it is recommended that the first dose of the MMR vaccine is administered at the age of 12 months and the second dose three months after the first dose or as soon as possible thereafter. In high-risk cases the second dose may be administered a minimum of four weeks after the first dose. These recommendations apply for as long as the epidemic outbreak of measles is in progress and until a new Committee decision is issued. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention carries out activities to inform the public, as well as vaccination interventions for vulnerable population groups. The evolution of the epidemic in Greece is systematically monitored by the Ministry of Health and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and, according to its progress, guidelines are issued based on the current data and the opinion of the competent scientific bodies.

A circular for **influenza** vaccination is issued by the above-mentioned agencies on an annual basis. Influenza vaccination includes only one vaccine dose and is recommended for all people aged over 6 months, if they wish to have it. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of influenza vaccination for individuals belonging to the so-called high-risk groups. The Health District Governors, the General Directors for Public Health and Social Welfare of the Districts and the Public Health and Social Care Directors of the Regional Units, as well as the mayors of the Kallikratis Municipalities of the country, collaborate with the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in organizing joint actions to inform the public and special populations (e.g. schools) about both influenza and the importance of influenza vaccination through the distribution of printed material, speeches, social messages in the media, etc. The National Organization for Medicines (EOF) is responsible for the adequacy of the vaccine in the Greek market throughout the transmission period of the influenza virus. The activity of influenza and the circulating virus strains are monitored through the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention's supervision networks, with laboratory supervision in the Greek Influenza Report Centres. The notification of each laboratory-confirmed influenza case is made at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, which sends the annual epidemiological surveillance report on influenza to the Public Health Directorate of the Ministry of Health. An epidemiological surveillance bulletin on influenza is issued on a weekly basis, including information on the vaccination status of severe laboratory-confirmed influenza cases hospitalized in intensive care units, as well as on the vaccination status of those who died. There is no dedicated official responsibility for call and follow-up for those who have not been vaccinated against measles or influenza. The vaccine and the vaccination performed are recorded in the personal Booklet of Child Health (in writing) and in the national electronic database that is linked to the National Register of Social Insurance for both children and adults.

Special programmes

To address the health needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular immigrants in Greece, a relevant circular has

been issued, according to which they should be vaccinated as a matter of priority against measles, rubella, mumps, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and poliomyelitis, and newborns against tuberculosis. If epidemiological supervision reveals a series of cases, meningococcal and influenza vaccination is recommended during the virus circulation period, at the age of ≥ 6 months. In the second year, and if their stay in the country is prolonged, vaccinations are supplemented according to the national vaccination programme and a tuberculin-reaction check is performed. The above recommendations are updated depending on epidemiological data and the availability of vaccines.

Vaccination coverage

Vaccination coverage of the population is researched at the national level through studies conducted by the National School of Public Health, by the country's universities, by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, and by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Vaccination coverage of children in Greece against measles is maintained at a high level. However, vulnerable social groups such as the Roma have a low level of vaccination coverage. As far as adult influenza vaccination is concerned, there has been an increase, but it is still at low levels compared to the European goal.

Provision

Vaccines are provided to the Health Centres of the Health Districts of the country and to the Public Health Directorates of the Regional Units. The health professionals who administer the vaccines are mostly nurses and physicians in the public and private sectors. Special cases, such as mobile populations (e.g. refugees, asylum applicants) with no National Register of Social Insurance, are being vaccinated by organizations such as nongovernmental organizations or the National Red Cross following the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines.

Financing

Vaccines included in the national vaccination programme, including those against measles for children and against influenza for adults, are provided free of charge to all legal residents in the country, whether insured or not, including asylum-seekers. Vaccines are covered through the Greek National Health Service Organization (EOPYY) and by extension from the state budget. There are no charges at the point of delivery for vaccinations included in the national vaccination programme.

Key barriers and facilitators

Obstacles and facilitators of effective vaccination coverage for measles and influenza are common. The development and extent of the anti-vaccination movement constitute a major obstacle to increasing the rate of vaccinations. At present, vaccinations are not mandatory and sanctions are not imposed. In addition, a large percentage of Greek citizens are unaware of the existence of adult vaccination and consider vaccinations to be an issue only for children. The absence of a national vaccination archive also inhibits the search for those who refuse vaccination or those who need to update their vaccination status. The free provision to everyone of the vaccines included in the national vaccination programme is, however, a major facilitator of vaccination coverage in Greece.

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