

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ADULT INFLUENZA VACCINATION



Campaign Overview: France

Authors

Ms. Yifan Zheng
Dr. Jane Barratt



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Authors
Ms. Yifan Zheng
Dr. Jane Barratt

Design
Ms. Chesley Ryder

Reviewer
Ms. Anna Sangster



Executive Summary

France has a two-pronged approach to immunisation. In the first instance vaccination is free for at-risk populations including older adults, pregnant women, people with chronic conditions and obese persons and secondly there is an emphasis on vaccinating health care professionals as well as those people in close proximity to the most susceptible groups.

An annual national awareness campaign led by public health authorities aims to raise awareness of the importance of influenza vaccination and dispel negative misconceptions around vaccines. The campaign is well planned and organized with clear objectives and guidelines for practice as well as sharable assets. The campaign messages are disseminated through the media and the internet including TV spots, videos, booklet and brochure, fact sheet, poster, press releases, personalized invitation letters, a dedicated campaign website and social media.

In large part, the campaign in France is driving solely by the government. Although the commitment of health care providers in favor of improving awareness and coverage of influenza vaccination is highly valued, the potential influence of civil society (including patient organization, advocacy group and ageing association) is understated.

Demographic Details

France, in 2018, had an estimated population of 67 million with some 20% (13.4 million) aged 65 years and over.¹ Low fertility rates will continue to be a feature in the next two decades leading to population decline, and further ageing of the population. By 2050, approximately 20 million people in France will be 65 years and over, representing 27.8% of the total population. Furthermore, 16.8% of the population will be 75 years of age and over, representing more than 12 million.²

Alongside the demographic upheaval of population ageing is the increasing prevalence and burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). In 2016, an estimated 88% of total deaths was attributed to NCDs with cardiovascular disease (CVD), chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes responsible for 34% of all deaths.³

NCDs also exact a heavy toll on European Union (EU)'s economic growth. Every year, NCDs cost EU economies €115 billion in healthcare expenses, equivalent to 0.8% of GDP. Further losses are incurred due to the lower productivity and employments rates of people living with chronic health problems.⁴

Context

Influenza is characterized by its potential to result in serious complications, excess mortality and significant functional decline in the ageing population and those with chronic conditions. A wave of influenza in metropolitan France occurs every year during the autumn and winter and affects 2-6 million people. On average, more than 90% of influenza-related deaths (9,000 cases) occur in people over 65 years of age.⁵

Although most people in France (70%) know that the influenza vaccine is the first step of protection against the virus and some 95% recognize that it can lead to severe complications and death in frail people, the general coverage and especially of those at-risk remains sorely inadequate.⁶ In the 2018-2019 season, about half of those aged 65 years and over and 70% of at-risk individuals (0-64 years) were not vaccinated against influenza.⁷

The suboptimal uptake of influenza vaccine may be attributed to the misconception around the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. In 2018 a study showed that about half of the population believe that the influenza vaccine carries health risks or activates the flu virus, 21% still doubt the efficacy of the vaccine.⁸ It also appears more difficult to motivate French citizens who have never been vaccinated to adopt the action.⁶

In France, the Ministry of Solidarity and Health is responsible for developing and overseeing the implementation of the National Immunisation Plan and Programme. Several public institutions have a specific mandate to boost immunization awareness and vaccine coverage. Public Health France is responsible for raising the awareness of the population about prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD), largely through online information.⁹ Encouraging vulnerable people to be vaccinated is also the mission of the Health Insurance France (L'Assurance Maladie), which is the public health insurance system that pays reimbursements for health care in the case of sickness, maternity, occupational disease and work accident.¹⁰

The L'Assurance Maladie in partnership with Public Health France disseminates the influenza awareness campaign annually. The 2018 Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Campaign began on October 6 and continued until January 31, 2019, featuring the slogan "Do not let the flu spoil the winter".¹¹ The campaign positions vaccination as the first step of protection against influenza and stresses the importance of breaking known barriers.

Civil society appears to have a lesser role in promoting the awareness of influenza vaccination among the public, with few examples such as the European Lung Foundation communicating with their constituents about influenza vaccination.

Government Campaign

National Immunization Program

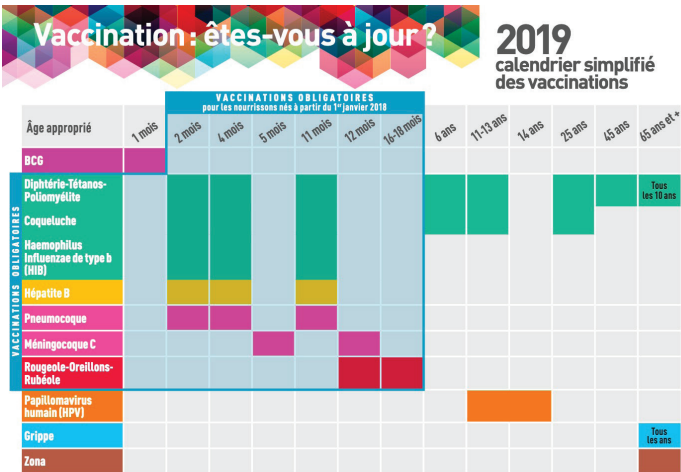
The National Immunisation Recommendations and Schedule is published annually by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health, setting out the national immunisation schedule and the regulatory as well

as organisational aspects of the implementation of vaccination policies.⁹ Regional health agencies are mandated to follow the national recommendations and schedule and provide corresponding immunisation services.¹²

According to the 2019 National Immunisation Recommendations and Schedule, the seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended and offered free of charge every year for at-risk populations. These populations comprise people aged 65 years and over; individuals with certain chronic conditions (such as lung diseases, cardiovascular diseases, neurological diseases, kidney and liver diseases, diabetes, cancers and immunity disorders); pregnant women; obese people; relatives of particularly vulnerable newborns; residents of nursing homes, and health care professionals working in regular and prolonged contact with people at-risk for severe influenza.¹³

With reference to the National Immunisation Schedule, Public Health France developed a simplified version of the vaccination calendar to remind consumers about recommended vaccines and timing.¹⁴

Figure 1: National Immunization Schedule



Booklet

“Understanding Immunization: Children, Adolescents, Adults” was published by Public Health France in 2019 to respond to frequently asked questions about immunisation against VPD.¹⁵

The serious and even fatal impacts of influenza on older people and those with chronic diseases is

explained, and these risk groups are reminded that the vaccine is fully covered by health insurance for them.

Figure 2: Booklet



Web page

Public Health France and the L'Assurance Maladie provide online information to strengthen the knowledge about influenza and vaccination to the general public.

On the site of Public Health France, the causes, consequences, transmission, prevention and treatment of influenza are described in some detail in simple language.¹⁶ The severity of influenza in at-risk populations and the possible complications triggered by influenza is expressed through messages such as “complications may then appear, such as a serious lung infection (viral or bacterial pneumonia), and a worsening of an already existing chronic disease (diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart failure, chronic kidney disease, cystic fibrosis, etc.)”.¹⁷

'Vaccination-info-service.fr' developed by the Public Health France is a dedicated site and trusted source of reliable and scientifically validated information on VPD and on vaccines and vaccinations.⁵ Most frequently asked questions include: who should be vaccinated and why, efficacy and impact, vaccine options, price and reimbursement, main contraindications, side effects and vaccination practice are outlined. There is also specific information for older people and those with chronic diseases, noting that infectious diseases are more frequent and more serious.^{18,19}

L'Assurance Maladie provides comprehensive information about influenza by topics on its website.²⁰ These online resources help people understand the influenza virus, transmission, epidemic status, symptoms, evolution, treatment and vaccination. Extra attention on influenza prevention was presented to at-risk people including older people and patients with chronic diseases together with the encouragement to be vaccinated at no cost.^{21,22} For example, for people living with asthma, the message is "influenza can contribute to the occurrence of seizures, and as such, being vaccinated against the flu is an essential precaution."²³

Figure 2: Fact sheets



Fact sheet

The Ministry of Solidarity and Health produced two information sheets to educate the public about the essential knowledge of influenza and vaccination.

The fact sheet "Influenza" provides an introductory overview of the disease and communicates that "vaccination is the best way to protect yourself against the flu. It is recommended and reimbursed

for people most at-risk groups such as adults aged 65 years or older and persons with certain chronic diseases or weakened immune systems".²⁴

The "5 (False) Misconceptions" fact sheet was designed to dispel the myths on influenza and vaccination.²⁵ It describes the serious nature of influenza, the efficacy and safety of the vaccine, the irreplaceable role of vaccine in influenza prevention and the need for annual vaccination.

Invitation package

Every year between mid-September and early October, more than 12 million people covered by the National Immunisation Program (with the exception of pregnant women and people who are obese) receive a personal invitation to be vaccinated against influenza. Accompanying the invitation is a vaccine certificate and a leaflet co-branded by the Ministry of Solidarity, Public Health France, the L'Assurance Maladie and the Agricultural Social Mutuality (MSA).²⁶

Figure 3: Invitation package



On presentation of the vaccine certificate a person can have the influenza vaccine free of charge from a pharmacist. The content of the educational leaflet is updated each year to educate those who are at-risk for influenza on the benefits and the importance of influenza vaccination.

Brochure

The L'Assurance Maladie in partnership with the Sophia service produced targeted information brochures for patients with asthma or diabetes. The brochure summarizes 6 reasons for the influenza vaccination and provides guidance on when and how to be vaccinated.^{27,28}

The severity of influenza, the safety and benefit of vaccination for people living with asthma or diabetes are well explained and followed by the practical details of vaccination.

Figure 4: Brochure



Poster

Posters for the general public and specifically for citizens aged 65 years and over are disseminated to health care professionals for broader outreach to patients.²⁸

A call-for-action to vaccinate against influenza is clearly displayed on the posters, coupled with the explanation that “vaccination is the first step to

protect yourself from the flu if you are 65 years old or over, living with chronic disease or pregnant”.

TV spot

In 2018, the L'Assurance Maladie broadcast a 25-second television public health announcement to remind audiences on the importance of influenza vaccination and the serious impact of influenza.^{28,29} The announcement includes information about the people for whom the vaccination is recommended and invites them to be vaccinated as winter approaches. The take-away message is “Do not let the flu spoil the winter” and is followed by the “Talk to a health professional” tip. In addition to televising nationally, the advertisement was broadcast on the screens installed in 1,200 pharmacies from October 26 to November 8, 2018.^{28,32}

A powerful partnership with TV channels France 2 and France 3 from 28 October to 2 December communicated (following the weather forecast) each evening that flu season was approaching, the danger of flu, and the best protection through vaccination.²⁸

Video

Educational videos focused on the theme “do not let the flu spoil the winter” were broadcast on the website, YouTube channels and other social media platforms of the L'Assurance Maladie as well as in the reception areas of the L'Assurance Maladie building.^{28,30}

News release

The Ministry of Solidarity uses press releases to officially announce the onset of the annual influenza awareness campaign and with that sets out campaign plans and activities.^{11,31,32} In addition to outlining the goals and targeted audiences press releases also serve as a call-for-action to mobilize people considered at-risk including those aged 65 years and over, patients suffering from certain chronic conditions (e.g. respiratory, cardiovascular, diabetes), pregnant women and their children, as well as obese people.

The L'Assurance Maladie also periodically publishes news articles throughout the course of the national awareness campaign to urge those who are insured to be vaccinated against influenza.^{33,34,35,36}

Non-government Organizations

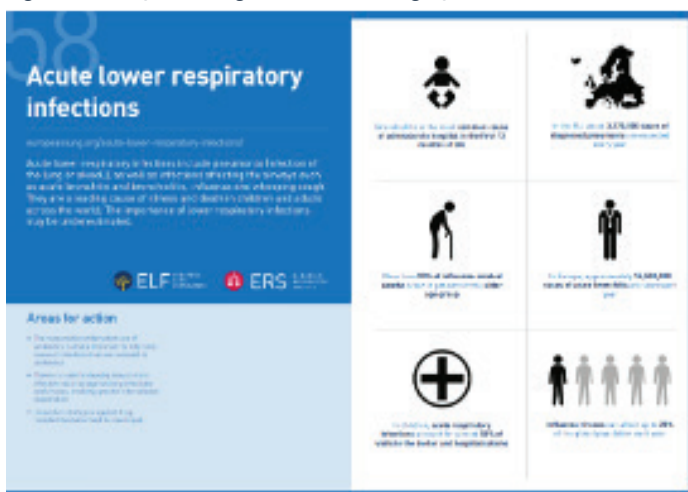
European Lung Foundation

The European Lung Foundation (ELF) conveys information to their members on influenza, including the symptoms, causes, prevention, treatment, burden and future needs.³⁷ The Foundation recognizes the serious impact of influenza infection on adults over the age of 65 years and those with existing medical conditions.













Infographics is a medium used by ELF to illustrate the impact of influenza on people with acute lower respiratory infections, including pneumonia, acute bronchitis and bronchiolitis, influenza and whooping cough.³⁸ The life-threatening impact of influenza on older people was described through the message “more than 90% of influenza-related deaths occur in patients in the older age group.”

Press releases are used by ELF to summarize and share in an easy-read form the findings of research looking at the increased risk of heart attacks and strokes due to specific respiratory infection (influenza or pneumonia).³⁹ Special attention was given to the potential of vaccine in fighting against not only respiratory infections but also adverse cardiovascular complications.

Figure 5: European Lung Foundation Infographic



Status of National Influenza Vaccination Campaign

Comprehensive policies and programs	Influenza vaccination is recommended by government and advisory bodies for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic diseases	
	Influenza vaccination is funded under the National Immunization Program (NIP) and administered through the state program for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic disease	
Clear communication strategy	Published context-specific communication strategy and action plan which defines communication goals, target audiences, expected roles of partner organizations, communication tools and timeline	
Well-defined audience	Universal message distributed to undifferentiated populations (general audiences regardless of age and underlying health condition)	
	Dedicated and tailored information for specific at-risk audience	
Multiple tools and channels	Online communication such as web content, digital technology, social media, online publications, email	
	Messages are disseminated offline by TV, radio, printout (e.g. leaflet, poster, brochure, outdoor ads)	
	Interactive communication including individual consultation, street campaign and face-to-face mobilization	
Realistic timeline	Timely flu season alert and vaccination reminder	
	National/regional events scheduled for intensive awareness campaign such as national vaccination day/week/month	
Regular updates of information	Information is updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent evidence and policy, such as recommending newly licensed vaccines for specific recipient	
Engagement and support of civil society	Communication on influenza by patient associations, ageing organizations and advocacy groups	

 Well-developed
  Partially developed
  Not yet developed / No evidence

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