

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ADULT INFLUENZA VACCINATION



Campaign Overview: South Korea

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Executive Summary

Korea has an age-targeted influenza immunization program that provides free vaccination to older adults aged 65 years and over, children aged between 6 months to 12 years and pregnant women. Even though adults with chronic diseases are defined as an at-risk group for serious complications from influenza infection, they do not benefit from free vaccination policy.

Every year, the Ministry of Health and Welfare in partnership with the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) launches an awareness campaign to promote free vaccination among targeted groups. Timely messages are disseminated through multiple channels, including text messages, the campaign website, formal governmental notices, infographics, videos, posters and press releases.

Excluded from the national influenza immunization program, patients with chronic condition are also largely overlooked from the government-led awareness campaign. To respond to this gap, the Korean Society of Infectious Diseases has committed to driving communication about influenza vaccination to those neglected groups. A series of leaflets produced by the Society describe are targeted to patients with underlying problems with lung, heart, kidney, liver or diabetes about the need for influenza vaccination.

Demographic Details

Korea (South Korea), in 2018, had an estimated population of 51.6 million with some 13% under the age of 15 years and 14.4% (7.4 million) aged 65 years and over.¹ Future low fertility rates is expected to contribute to a decline in the total population and a growing disparity between the ageing population and the younger cohort. By 2050, approximately 19.1 million people in Korea will be aged 65 years and over, representing 38.1% of the total population. There will be some four older people for each Korean person aged 0-14 years.²

Alongside population ageing, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) is looming as a major public health concern in Korea. In 2016, an estimated 80% of total deaths were attributed to NCDs with cardiovascular disease (CVD), chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes collectively accounting for 33% of all deaths.³

Context

Infectious diseases, including influenza and pneumococcal pneumonia are serious public health issues in Korea. From 2003 to 2013, an average of 2,900 deaths in excess of normally expected numbers were attributable to influenza every year. Older Koreans are at a higher risk of dying from influenza than other age groups - the average annual influenza-associated excess mortality rate in Koreans aged 65 years and over was 46.98 per 100,000 people compared with 5.97 in the general population.⁴

Among the countries that are a part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, South Korea had the second highest influenza vaccination rate for people aged ≥65 years in 2013.⁵ In the 2018-2019 season, 82.7% (6.3 million) of the older Koreans aged 65 years and over received the influenza vaccination.⁶

The influenza vaccination success story in large part can be credited to its targeted immunization communication and structured public education programs. Every year, the Ministry of Health and Welfare in partnership with the Korea Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) launch an awareness campaign to promote free vaccination for at-risk populations covered by the National Immunization Program (NIP).

With the exception of the Korean Society of Infectious Diseases (KSID) civil society (advocacy groups and patient organisations) do not appear have a strong voice in reinforcing the government campaign. The Committee of Adult Immunization of the Korean Society of Infectious Diseases (KSID) recognized the need for vaccination guidelines for adults and thereafter developed an adult immunization schedule based on the epidemic trend of vaccine-preventable diseases in Korea.

Government Campaign

National Immunization Program

Vaccination against seasonal influenza was introduced as a supplementary activity to the National Immunization Program (NIP) in 1997 with the purpose to minimize the disease burden in at-risk groups.⁷

Those citizens most at-risk of influenza defined in the NIP are adults aged 65 years and over; patients with chronic conditions including lung or heart diseases, metabolic disease (diabetes mellitus), renal disease, chronic liver disease, malignancy, immunocompromised conditions, hemoglobinopathy; and children of 6 months to 18 years of age taking aspirin.⁸

However, influenza vaccination is not free of charge to all influenza NIP target groups. To date, older citizens aged 65 years and older, pregnant women and children aged 6 months to 12 years are eligible for free influenza vaccination covered by NIP but people living with chronic disease are excluded.

To improve access to the influenza vaccination, commission of free service for older people was turning over from public health units to private clinics in 2015, which contributed to an increase in the influenza vaccination rate among this population from 73% to 80.9%.⁷

Computerized registration program

KCDC has developed a web-based national immunization registry to gather individual immunization information, manage vaccination records, as well as be a communication channel for health promotion.⁷ Koreans who are registered in the system receive timely reminders of when to have the influenza vaccination by text messages and can also check their vaccination history via a mobile application and online immunization registry system.⁸

Figure 1: Adult Immunization Schedule

Adult Immunization Schedule

The Ministry of Health and Welfare and KCDC jointly publish an adult immunisation schedule organised by vaccine and age group.⁹ The schedule indicates the recommended age groups and medical indications for licensed vaccines that are commonly suggested for adults aged 19 years and older.

According to the schedule, influenza vaccination is recommended for all adults aged 19 years and over. Koreans aged 50 years and over are recommended to be given the top priority on influenza vaccination (age range greater than the that of the NIP target group for people aged 65 years and over)

Web page

Accessible information and communications about influenza and vaccination recommendations by age groups and those at-risk are comprehensively displayed on the KCDC website.

In addition to the description of the causes, symptoms, complications, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of influenza, the information pages also illustrate outbreak trends and include a section on frequently asked questions about influenza transmission, vaccination for pregnant women and the difference between influenza and the common cold.¹⁰

The danger of influenza in at-risk populations is stressed by way of an explanation that older people and patients with chronic diseases are more susceptible because of weakened immune systems to influenza-related complications and death. Therefore, KCDC strongly encourages these populations to be vaccinated optimally between October and November.¹¹

Additionally, information on vaccine preventable diseases that covered under NIP can also be found from a specific NIP website launched by KCDC¹².

Figure 2: Notice

2019년
어르신 인플루엔자 예방접종 안내문

예방접종으로 겨울건강 준비하세요!
10월 15일부터 가까운 동네 병·의원에서
인플루엔자 예방접종이 무료로 시행됩니다.

어르신 인플루엔자 예방접종 지원사업

- 지원대상**
만 65세 이상 어르신(1954. 12. 31. 이전 출생자)
- 접종기관**
지정 의료기관 및 보건소
※ 보건소는 지역 특성에 따라 예방접종일정이 다를 수 있으므로 보건소 방문 전에 확인하시기 바랍니다.
- 지원내용**
인플루엔자 예방접종 1회
- 접종일정**
만 75세 이상 (1944. 12. 31. 이전 출생자) 10. 15.(화)~ 11. 22.(금)
만 65세 이상 (1954. 12. 31. 이전 출생자) 10. 22.(화)~ 11. 22.(금)
* 보건소에서는 11. 23.(토) 이후에도 백신 소진시까지 접종 가능합니다.

이런 분들은 예방접종을 받아서는 안됩니다!

- 과거 인플루엔자 백신 접종 후 중증(생명에 위협적인) 알레르기 반응이 있었던 경우
- 인플루엔자 백신접종 후 6주 이내 기력·바레 증후군의 과거력이 있는 사람은 예방접종 중 주의가 필요합니다.

Together with basic knowledge on influenza is the strong message that those people most at-risk are priorities for influenza vaccination under the NIP.¹³

Notice

Annually the KCDC formally announces the the influenza NIP program for Koreans aged 65 years and over.¹⁴

The announcement provides detailed instructions for those eligible for the free influenza services about the designated medical institutions, recommended vaccination dates (15 Oct - 22 Nov for people 75 years and older; 22 Oct – 22 Nov for people aged 65 years and over) and practical tips before and after vaccination. The notice urges eligible Koreans to prepare for winter by having their vaccination.

Figure 3: Infographic



Infographic

Infographics promote the free influenza vaccination program to eligible population groups.¹⁵ The 2019 infographic entitled “A promise for a healthy tomorrow, vaccination!” encourages those targeted to be vaccinated against influenza on a designated date using both lighthearted text and animated graphics.

Poster

Under the national influenza awareness campaign, every year, posters are developed by KCDC to appeal to people aged 65 years and over.^{16,20}

The 2019 poster features an older couple and the slogan “Promise of healthy tomorrow: Continue

Figure 3: Poster



to be vaccinated” which aims to motivate as well as educate through the message that vaccination against influenza is needed every year.¹⁷ People aged 75 years and over are encouraged to be vaccinated earlier than those in the 65 to 74 year group.

Video

Public health messages about vaccination produced and disseminated by the KCDC in video formats.¹⁷ For example, a music video sung by two Korean men encourages children, pregnant women, older adults and people in medical institutions to be vaccinated against influenza.¹⁹

Similar content can be found in another animation video highlighting the necessity of the whole family being vaccinated.¹⁸ Misinformation and doubts about influenza and the vaccines are also challenged in the video that helps to explain the difference between a cold and influenza, the vaccination frequency, effectiveness and side effects and who should and should not receive a vaccination.

A further video that speaks specifically to older Koreans, features an older woman who experienced influenza with devastated consequences.¹⁹ Learning from this scenario, the message communicated is that older people must to protect themselves with the free flu shot.

Press release

Press releases regarding influenza vaccination are disseminated by the Ministry of Health and Welfare twice per month throughout the flu season. These are then often reposted by other public institutions, such as the NIP Information Centre, the National Health Insurance Service and the Welfare Service Centre to reach a wider audience.^{19,2021}

Alongside a brief report on the influenza epidemic and vaccination rates, press releases focus on informing those most at-risk of influenza about the free flu shots as well as providing instructions on how to access vaccination services and immunization in general.^{22,23,24,25,26,27}

Non-government Organizations

Korean Society of Infectious Diseases

Adult Immunization Schedule

In 2007, and then in 2012 and 2014 the Korean Society of Infectious Diseases (KSID) published a guideline on adult immunization, entitled “Vaccination for Adult”.⁸ As part of the guideline licensed vaccines are listed by age group and produced in Korean, English, Russian, Mongolian, Vietnamese, Japanese and Chinese.

According to the KSID schedule, annual influenza vaccination is recommended for all adults aged 19 years and over. Older adults aged 50 years and over are given the top priority considering both the health and economic benefits of vaccination for this group.

Figure 4: Korean Society of Infectious Diseases Adult Immunization Schedule

Vaccine	19-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-64 years	≥ 65 years
Scarlet fever/diphtheria/tetanus	1 dose (one of 10 days for 10 doses); then boost with Td every 10 years (strength I)		1 dose (one of 10 days for 10 doses); then boost every 10 years (strength I) (also only for adults under 65 years old)		
Influenza	1 dose annually (strength II)			1 dose annually (strength II)	
Hepatitis A	2 doses (at 0 and 6 months) (strength I)	For seronegatives, 2 doses (at 0 and 6 months) (strength II)		For high-risk groups*, check serology; 2 doses for seronegatives (at 0 and 6 months) (strength I)	
Hepatitis B	When 3 doses of immunization uncertain, vaccinate the seronegatives (strength II)			For high-risk groups* with uncertain immunization history of 3 doses, vaccinate seronegatives (strength II)	
Meningococcal	For high-risk groups*, at least 1 dose; check serology for women planning a pregnancy (strength I)				
Varicella	For high-risk groups*, check serology; 2 doses for seronegatives (strength II)				
Human Papillomavirus	Female (strength II)				
Meningococcal			For high-risk groups*, 1 or 2 doses (strength II)		
Pneumococcal			For high-risk groups*, 1 dose (strength I)		1 dose (strength I)
Zoster				1 dose (strength II)	1 dose (strength II)

For all persons in this category who meet the age requirements

Recommended for adults if other risk factor is present

Not recommended

* Step 1: Adult Tetanus, Pertussis, Diphtheria, Td & Adult Tetanus, Diphtheria

* For persons aged < 65 years, follow the recommendations by the Korean Pediatric Society

* For persons aged 10-59 years, if no live recommendations, follow the recommendations of those aged 10-29 years

Strengths of recommendation

(I) Very strongly recommended: immunization may reduce mortality and be cost-effective. Most countries recommend the vaccination.

(II) Strongly recommended: immunization may reduce mortality but cost-effectiveness is unknown in Korea. Most developed countries recommend the vaccination.

(III) Recommended: immunization may reduce mortality rather than morbidity. Cost-effectiveness is unknown.

(IV) Recommendation reserved: lack of evidence for recommendation.

Leaflet













KSID has also created a series of targeted leaflets to explain the rationale of immunization, the risk associated with infectious diseases and the available vaccines for certain at-risk groups.²⁸

As an example of a leaflet intended for people aged 50 years and over depicts how immune function decreases with age, increasing the risk of infectious diseases (one of them being influenza) and its severe complications. Based on this statement, KSID suggests older adults be vaccinated against influenza annually between October and December.

Figure 7: Leaflets



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 population (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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