





Influencing Adult Pneumonia Vaccination Policy

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Background

Currently in Austria, 26.2% of the population is over 60 years of age. This number is expected to rise to over 36% by 2050.¹ With population ageing, the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) increases, as does the risk of complication from vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs). In Austria, NCDs account for 92% of all deaths, with cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes attributing 41%, 5% and 4% of all deaths, respectively.² Older people and those with chronic NCDs are likely to contract and experience serious complications from VPDs, such as pneumococcal pneumonia.³

In Austria, the death rate due to pneumonia is highest in those 70 years of age and older, with an incidence of 70.95 per 100 000 people.^{4,5} The incidence is over 17 times greater than that in the 50 to 69 year old age group (4.33 per 100 000).^{4,5} Austria releases annual surveillance on the incidence of invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD), defined by isolation of pneumococcal bacteria from a normally sterile sample and often resulting in serious disease.⁶ In 2019, the greatest incidence of invasive pneumococcal diseases (IPD) cases occurred in adults 65 years of age and older.⁶ There is lack of data on the incidence of non-invasive cases of community-acquired pneumonia, which may still result in morbidity and loss of function for at-risk groups.

In Austria, pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for healthy adults over 60 years of age, and other adults considered to be at-risk to chronic health conditions. According to the PneuVUE study, which examined adult pneumonia vaccination across nine European countries, awareness of pneumonia vaccination and vaccination uptake is low in Austria. 37% of adults surveyed are aware of pneumonia vaccination, yet only 11% of high-risk adults have been vaccinated against pneumonia.

Pneumonia Vaccine Policy in Austria

In Austria, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales, Gesundheit und Konsumentenschutz [BMASGK]) is responsible for creating the national vaccination program and procuring vaccines.⁹ The BMASGK is aided by the National Vaccination Board (Nationales Impfgremium), comprising appropriate specialists and experts with the primary role of vaccination recommendations based on the latest scientific evidence.^{9, 10}

Vaccines and information on vaccination is provided at the regional level.⁹ The Federal Office for Safety in Health Care (*Bundesamt für Sicherheit im Gesundheitswesen [BASG]*) is responsible for approving the use of vaccines and monitoring their effectiveness, safety, and production once in use.¹¹

Pneumococcal vaccination is currently recommended for three adult groups: healthy adults over 60 years of age, adults over 50 years old with increased risk due to pre-existing health conditions or risk factors such as smoking or alcohol abuse, and adults of any age with chronic health conditions, such as immunocompromising conditions, chronic respiratory diseases, chronic cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.⁷ Sequential vaccination of these groups is recommended with one dose of the 13-valent conjugate vaccine followed by one dose of the 23-valent polysaccharide vaccine.⁷ Dosing schedules and additional doses vary based on the high risk group.⁷ Vaccination for adults is not covered by Austrian social insurance and requires a medical prescription, while childhood vaccination outlined in Austria's vaccination calendar is free.¹² A medical prescription must be issued by a doctor, then filled and purchased at the pharmacy. The doctor then charges a fee for carrying out the vaccination.^{12,13}

Government Pneumonia Vaccine Information

Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) provides information on a variety of vaccination topics, vaccine side effects, elimination programs and research projects. The RKI also shares STIKO recommendations on the implementation of vaccinations.¹⁶

Vaccination Calendar and Plan

The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (BMASGK) produces a vaccination calendar, that indicates the need for pneumococcal vaccination for adults over 60 years of age (Figure 1).⁷

An online version of the national annual vaccination plan is also provided by the BMASGK.⁷ This plan includes detailed recommendations for pneumococcal vaccination, population groups who are considered at-risk, which pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for the groups, and dosing and timing of vaccination.

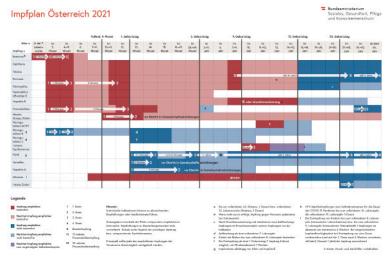


Figure 1. Austrian vaccination plan released by the Federal Ministry of Labour. Social Affairs. Health and Consumer Protection.

Web pages

The BMASGK website includes web pages on individual infectious diseases, under a heading titled "Infectious Diseases AZ". The web page on pneumococci provides details on the pathogen, its transmission, disease course and vaccination to prevent disease.¹⁴ The web page indicates that vaccination is recommended for adults over 50 years of age, and adult age groups with increased risk. It indicates that healthy adults over 60 years old are recommended to receive the two different types of pneumococcal vaccination every year. The web page links to the national vaccination plan and advises that consumers seek further details about the recommended vaccinations from a doctor or pharmacist.

Technical information on the vaccines included in the national program, including both approved pneumococcal vaccines, is on another web page.¹⁵

The BMASGK website features pages on health and sickness in older age¹⁶, diabetes¹⁷ and cardiovascular diseases¹⁸, however, vaccination is not mentioned despite recommendations that these groups receive pneumococcal vaccination.

Public Health Portal of Austria

The national public health portal provides evidence-based information on health and illness and is reviewed systematically by a field of experts.¹⁹

Web pages

The portal provides general information on vaccination and targets specific high-risk groups. For example, "Vaccinations for Adults" is a webpage that provides information on the specific schedule, who to ask about vaccination, where to find more information, and the cost of vaccination.²⁰ The web page "Vaccination against pneumococci" provides information on pneumococcal infections, disease outcomes, at-risk groups, and vaccination for adults.²¹



Several web pages on chronic diseases, such as asthma,²² chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD),²³ heart failure²⁴ and arthritis,²⁵ mention pneumococcal vaccination as a preventative measure. Furthermore, detailed information on lung infections and at-risk groups indicates vaccination as a measure of prevention.²⁶

Federal Office for Safety in Health Care

The Federal Office for Safety in Health Care (Bundesamt für Sicherheit im Gesundheitswesen [BASG]) provides a list of approved vaccines and links to the annual vaccination schedule.²⁷

Non-Government Pneumonia Vaccine Information

Austrian Lung Union

The Austrian Lung Union (Österreichische Lungenunion) aims to provide information and strategies for coping with lung diseases.²⁸ Their website includes various pages advising pneumococcal vaccination for older people and those with chronic disease, including COPD and asthma.^{29,30} On World COPD Day and World Lung Day there is a more focused campaign that mentions pneumococcal vaccination to help maintain health.^{31,32}

2020 Campaign in Austrian Pharmacies

From September to March 2020, Austrian pharmacies offered pneumococcal vaccines at a reduced price to reduce risk of lung disease during the COVID-19 pandemic.³³ Health experts appealed to at-risk groups to receive the pneumococcal vaccine. The Public Health Portal of Austria and the Austrian Lung Union highlighted the campaign via web pages on their websites (Figure 2).^{33,34} Other major Austrian news outlets also reported on the campaign.³⁵





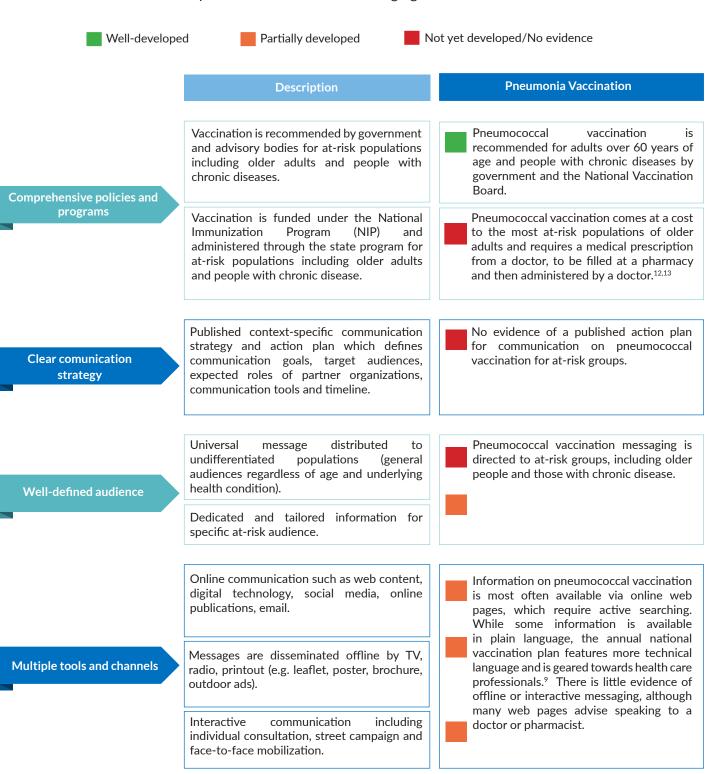
Impfungen, die Infektionen der Atemwege und ihre Folgeerscheinungen verhindern, sind in der Wintersaison 2020 wichtiger denn je. Da die Durchimpfungsraten in den letzten Jahren sehr gering waren, sind heuer besonders #Risikogruppen angehalten, sich gegen #Pneumokokken impfen zu lassen, um eine bakterielle Pneumokokken-Lungenentzündung zu verhindern. Eine Pneumokokken-#Impfaktion soll nun die Impfbereitschaft steigern.

Figure 2. Web page by the Austrian Lung Union on pneumococcal vaccine campaign in 2020.

Status of National Pneumonia Vaccination Messaging

Changing the Conversation on Adult Influenza Vaccination (CCAV) identifies seven components of effective adult influenza campaigns.³⁶ These components are presented in Table 1 to evaluate pneumonia vaccination messaging in Austria.

Table 1. Status of pneumonia vaccination messaging in Austria



Realistic timeline

Timely vaccination reminder.

National/regional events scheduled for intensive awareness campaign such as national vaccination day/week/month.

There is some evidence of campaigns to raise awareness on celebrated days such as World COPD Day and World Lung Day by the Austrian Lung Union. The 2020 vaccination campaign offered by Austrian pharmacies targeted at risk groups in preparation for the winter season by offering pneumococcal vaccination at a reduced price.³³

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.

Information on pneumococcal vaccination reflects most recent evidence but this is not real-time data. For example, a report on severe pneumococcal disease incidence is released annually by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection.⁶

Engagement of civil society

Communication by patient associations, ageing organizations and advocacy groups.

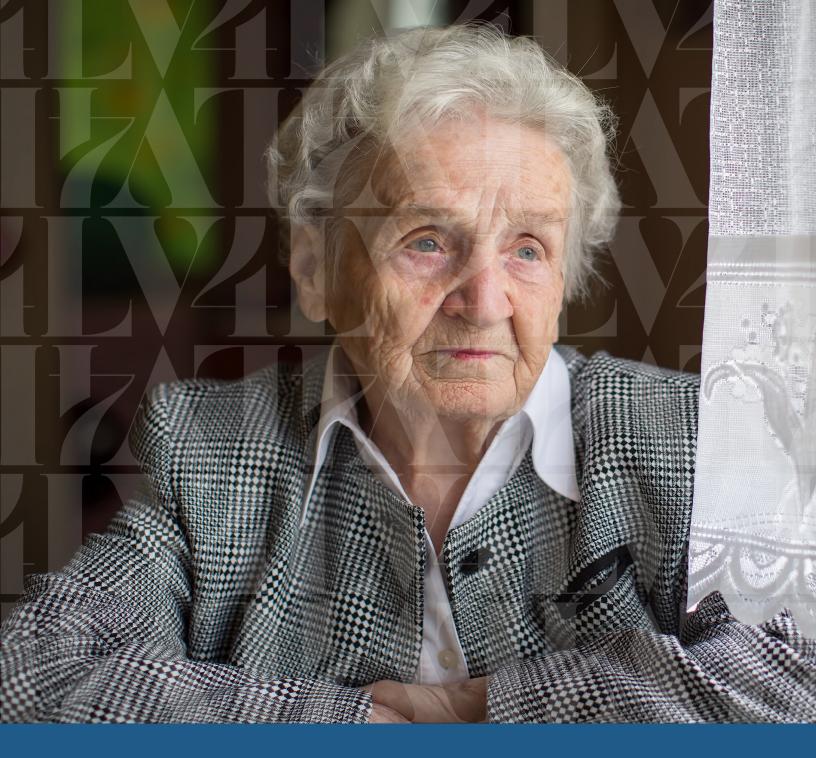
There is very little evidence of engagement from civil society organizations serving older people and people with chronic cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, except for the Austrian Lung Union, which provides information for those with chronic respiratory disease.

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