



Italy Country Report 2022

Influencing Adult Pneumonia Vaccination Policy

Authors

Dr. Jane Barratt

Ms. Katrina Bouzanis

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Background

Italy has one of the oldest populations in the world, with approximately 30% of its population over the age of 60 years.¹ This sub-population is expected to rise to approximately 42% by 2050.¹ Parallel to the population ageing is the increased burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In Italy, NCDs account for 91% of all deaths, with cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes attributing 36%, 6% and 3% of all deaths, respectively.² Older people and those with chronic NCDs are at-risk of experiencing serious complications that give rise to increases in morbidity and mortality from vaccine-preventable diseases, such as pneumococcal pneumonia.³

Those aged 70 years and over in Italy have the greatest mortality rate due to pneumonia, with an incidence of approximately 120 per 100 000 people.^{4,5} This incidence is about 18 times higher than that for the 50-69 years old age group.^{4,5} A 2014 study modelling hospitalization due to pneumococcal pneumonia found that the risk of hospitalization was strongly correlated with increased age, suggesting the need to tailor vaccination strategies to at-risk populations.⁶

In Italy, pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for those 65 years and older and adults of any age with predisposing conditions.^{7,8} The PneuVUE study, which examined adult pneumonia vaccination across nine European countries, found that in Italy awareness and uptake of pneumonia vaccination is particularly low.⁹ Only 21% of high-risk adults are aware of pneumonia vaccination. Alarming, only 5% of those at high risk of pneumonia have been vaccinated and only 1% of adults with a lower risk.⁹

Pneumonia Vaccine Policy in Italy

The Ministry of Health is responsible for defining the national immunization plan based on recommendations from the National Vaccines Commission (*Nazionale Vaccini Commissione*).¹⁰ However it is the regional authorities in Italy that are responsible for implementing vaccination programs in their regions.¹¹ All vaccinations included in the national immunization plan are provided to citizens for free.

Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for those 65 years and older. Older adults are recommended to receive the 13-valent conjugate vaccine, followed by the 23-valent polysaccharide vaccine at least 2 months after.¹²

Authorities recommend that older adults only receive these vaccines once in their lifetime.¹³ Those with predisposing conditions such as chronic heart diseases, lung diseases, diabetes, and immunocompromising conditions are recommended to also receive both available pneumococcal vaccinations.⁸



Government Pneumonia Vaccine Information

Ministry of Health

Vaccination Calendar and Plan

The Ministry of Health's vaccination calendar indicates pneumococcal vaccination, with both types of pneumococcal vaccines, for those 65 years and older and those subject to increased risk (Figure 1).⁷ The vaccination calendar does not define groups at increased risk.

A detailed vaccination plan is also published by the Ministry of Health, entitled 2017-2019 National Vaccine Prevention Plan.¹² The plan includes details on the vaccination calendar, vaccination coverage, and priorities and strategies to be implemented throughout the country. The current national vaccination plan was approved and published in 2017.

Though initially only extending to 2019, the validity of the plan was extended to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴

Web pages

The Ministry of Health provides information on vaccination. A web page on vaccination for persons 65 years and over indicates the need for pneumococcal vaccination.¹³ Both the dose and timing are specified in receiving both vaccines. While basic details are provided there is no explanation as to why pneumococcal vaccination is important for this group or the benefits of receiving the vaccines.

Another page entitled "People at-risk for pathology" details all vaccines recommended for at-risk groups.⁸ As part of the information pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for those with predisposing pathologies or conditions and provides a list of these conditions, which includes chronic heart diseases, chronic lung diseases, diabetes, chronic liver disease and a number of immunosuppressive conditions.

"Vaccine-preventable diseases" is a further section that details VPDs included in the vaccination plan. Pneumococcal infection (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*) is mentioned as a cause of meningitis, however its prevalence as the main etiologic agent of community-acquired pneumonia (CAP) is not mentioned. Despite the inclusion of pneumococcal vaccination in the national vaccination plan, pneumonia is not listed as a VPD on this web page.

Italia Longeva

Italia Longeva is the National Association for Aging and Active Longevity established by the Ministry of Health, to ensure the health and quality of life of older people and that longevity represents opportunity.¹⁶ Italia Longeva highlights all vaccines recommended for adults in their vaccination campaign content, including pneumococcal pneumonia, influenza, herpes zoster, tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis.¹⁷

Il calendario vaccinale del Piano Nazionale di Prevenzione Vaccinale 2017-2019

Vaccino	0gg-30gg	3° mese	4° mese	5° mese	6° mese	7° mese	11° mese	13° mese	15° mese	6° anno	12°-18° anno	19-49 anni	50-64 anni	> 64 anni	Soggetti ad aumentato rischio
DTPa**		DTPa	DTPa				DTPa			DTPa***	dTPaIPV	1 dose dTPa**** ogni 10 anni			(1)
IPV		IPV	IPV				IPV			IPV					(2)
Epatite B	EpB-EpB*	Ep B	Ep B				Ep B								(3)
Hib		Hib	Hib				Hib								(3)
Pneumococco		PCV	PCV				PCV							PCV+PPSV	(4) **
MPRV									MPRV	MPRV					(6) *
MPR									oppure MPR + V	oppure MPR + V					(5) *****
Varicella															(6) *
Meningococco C									Men C ⁵		Men ACWY coniugato				(7)
Meningococco B**		Men B	Men B		Men B				Men B						
HPV												HPV*: 2-3 dosi (in funzione di età e vaccino)			(8)
Influenza														1 dose all'anno	(9) **
Herpes Zoster														1 dose#	(10)
Rotavirus		Rotavirus# (due o tre dosi a seconda del tipo di vaccino)													
Epatite A															(11)

Figure 1. Vaccination calendar of the national immunization plan from Italy's Ministry of Health.



Videos

Videos are included in social communication campaigns created to raise awareness among older people on the importance of adult vaccination for longevity and good health.

Campaign messages from the videos include "Vaccinating is prevention; a healthy Italy is a great Italy",¹⁸ "Vaccinations in adulthood, #AWinningChoice"¹⁹ and "If you get vaccinated you run the risk of living for a long time" (Figure 2).²⁰ Two of the videos also featured Italian celebrities, including Italian actor, Pino Caruso, and sports star, Marco Tardelli.^{19,20} These videos highlight vaccination to protect against pneumococcal pneumonia, along with other VPDs. The videos being aired on Italian television networks, were part of larger campaigns on social media, and shared broadly via press releases.²¹

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The most recent video spot "Vaccinations in adulthood, #AWinningChoice" included a corresponding press kit with fact sheets on VPDs in adults, including pneumococcal pneumonia, its epidemiological burden and pneumococcal vaccine coverage in Italy.²²

"Getting vaccinated is not just for children. But do the elderly know?" is a video that asks older people on the street if they know they can be vaccinated against three diseases, one of them being pneumococcal pneumonia.²³



Figure 2. Video campaign on adult vaccination by Italia Longeva.

Infographic

An infographic created with the scientific contribution of the School of Specialization in Hygiene and Vaccinal Preventive Medicine of the University of Genoa (*Scuola di Specializzazione in Igiene e Medicina Preventiva Vaccinale dell'Università di Genova*), the Italian Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology (*Società Italiana di Geriatria e Gerontologia*) and the Italian Society of Hygiene (*Società Italiana di Igiene*) provides evidence-based information on vaccination of adults and older people (Figure 3).²⁴

The infographic provides information on pneumococcal pneumonia infection and disease, at-risk groups, vaccination as a means of prevention and free vaccination for those over 65 years and older and with underlying chronic disease.

Online Document

“Vaccinations of the elderly in the COVID era” analyzes the impact of the pandemic on adult vaccination, including pneumococcal vaccination, and strategies to improve vaccination access and awareness for older people.²⁵

The paper includes a literature review of interventions to improve vaccination coverage and good practices from experts and recommendations for implementing interventions and practices.

Events

With the mission of consolidating the central role of older people in health and welfare policies, Italia Longeva convenes events on adult vaccination and healthy ageing, virtually and in-person.

The program, press release, press review of all media outlets that publicized the events and speaker presentations are available online for each event.²⁶ The content of the events appears to be targeted to experts and health care professionals, while findings and news of the event are shared more broadly in radio and television, specialized publications, online publications and newsletters.²⁷

Non-Government Pneumonia Vaccine Information

Happy Ageing

HappyAgeing, the Italian Alliance for Active Ageing, promotes policy and initiatives aimed at protecting the health of older people.²⁸ They provide resources on adult vaccination and pneumococcal vaccination specifically. The “Go, go get vaccinated” campaign includes information and promotion of pneumonia vaccination for older people.²⁹ In their published position paper, HappyAgeing calls for the importance of investing in adult vaccination and specifically highlights the burden of pneumonia in Italy and the value of vaccination.²⁹

Poster

Knowledge assets such as posters encourages vaccination for older adults to protect against influenza, pneumonia and other illness.²⁹

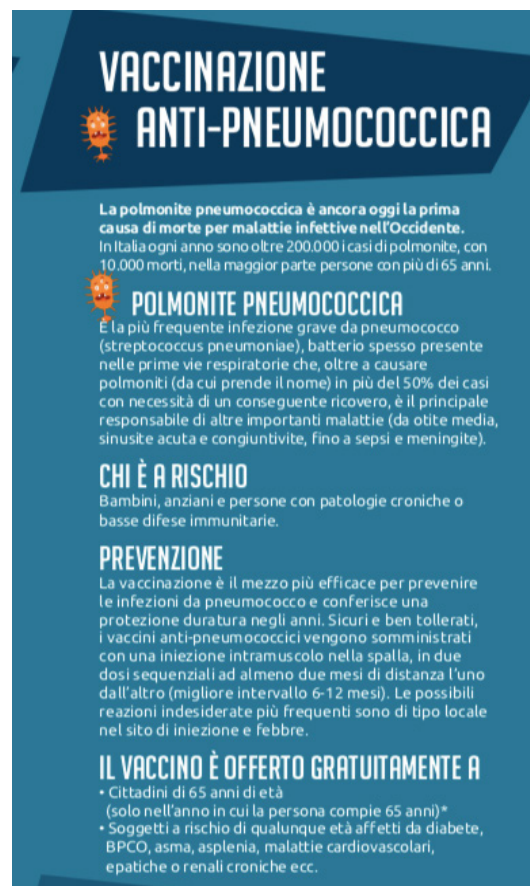


Figure 3. Infographic on adult pneumonia vaccination.



Brochures

Similarly, brochures indicate the burden of pneumonia for older adults and the importance of vaccination in preventing serious disease (Figure 4).²⁹

Frequently asked questions

Frequently asked questions include information on vaccines in older adults and at-risk groups, including for pneumococcal vaccination.³⁰ Questions include why it's necessary to be vaccinated, what does vaccination protect against and how vaccines affect the immune system.

Fact sheets

Fact sheets provide information on regional vaccination coverage, pneumococcal vaccination as an investment in the health of older people,³¹ best practices in adult vaccination,³² the epidemiological burden of pneumonia in Italy and the cost of not prioritizing pneumonia prevention.³⁴

Radio Spot

Radio spots are 15 and 20 seconds in length and encourage vaccination to prevent influenza, pneumonia and other illnesses for those over 65 years old.²⁹

Interview

In a written interview Dr. Michele Conversano, President of HappyAgeing, the Italian Alliance for Active Ageing, speaks generally on the importance of vaccination for the health of older people, and specifically speaks on the health risks associated with pneumonia and the protection provided by pneumonia vaccination.³⁵

Web pages

The organisational website also provides information on pneumococcal vaccination that highlights the importance of pneumococcal vaccination for older people, its inclusion on the national vaccination plan making it free of charge, its availability all year round,³⁶ and details on pneumococcal vaccination as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccination.³⁷

Italian Diabetes Association

The Italian Diabetes Association (*Associazione Italiana Diabetici*) aims to represent and provide health, moral, welfare, legal and social protection of diabetic citizens.³⁸

The organisational website provides information on vaccination against influenza and pneumococcal infection and explains pneumococcal infections, its effects, how vaccination prevents disease and the particular importance of vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁹



Figure 4. Brochure on adult vaccination by HappyAgeing.



Various knowledge assets have been developed to inform people with diabetes and their families about pneumococcal pneumonia including an online publication outlining the need for pneumococcal vaccination for people with diabetes⁴⁰ (Figure 5) and a video that provides further details on the recommended vaccines for this group.⁴¹

A consensus statement has also been published which details the susceptibility of people with diabetes to VPDs, and pneumococcal vaccination.⁴²

Spazio50 and CNA Pensionati

Ageing organizations Spazio50 and CNA Pensionati support adult vaccination campaigns from HappyAgeing and Italia Longeva, respectively, by sharing information via web pages on their websites.

Spazio50 joined the call from HappyAgeing to increase pneumococcal vaccination for older people and establish vaccine registries for adults.⁴³ CNA Pensionati shared Italia Longeva's "Vaccinations in adulthood, #AWinningChoice" campaign, emphasizing the importance of pneumococcal vaccination for older people and that vaccination is free.⁴⁴



Figure 5. Publication on pneumococcal vaccination for people with diabetes.

Status of National Pneumonia Vaccination Messaging

Changing the Conversation on Adult Influenza Vaccination identifies seven components of effective adult influenza campaigns.⁴⁵ These components are presented in Table 1 to evaluate pneumonia vaccination messaging in Italy.

Table 1. Status of pneumonia vaccination messaging in Italy.

■ Well-developed

■ Partially developed

■ Not yet developed/No evidence

	Description	Pneumonia Vaccination
Comprehensive policies and programs	Vaccination is recommended by government and advisory bodies for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic diseases.	■ Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended by the National Vaccines Commission and government for those 65 years and older in addition to those with a chronic medical condition.
	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.	■ Pneumococcal vaccination is included in the national vaccination plan and therefore free to recommended populations.
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.	■ No evidence of published action plan for communication on pneumococcal vaccination for at-risk groups.
Well-defined audience	Universal message distributed to undifferentiated populations (general audiences regardless of age and underlying health condition).	■ Pneumococcal vaccination messaging is directed to at-risk groups. Attention is paid to providing information to older people, demonstrated in campaigns by Italia Longeva and HappyAgeing, which specifically highlight the benefit of pneumonia vaccination for older people.
	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.	■ Information on pneumococcal vaccination, provided by Italia Longeva and HappyAgeing provides details on pneumococcal pneumonia, the benefits of vaccination for older people and the consequences of not being vaccinated. Each of the campaigns include offline messaging, such as TV and radio. There is less evidence of interactive messaging campaigns.
	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 vaccination reminder.

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

Pneumococcal vaccination is not included in reminders on health in the winter, however Italia Longeva and HappyAgeing highlight that pneumonia vaccination can be administered at any time during the year. Italia Longeva also launched resources in support of European Vaccination Week.⁴⁶

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.

The published national vaccination plan is currently outdated, as it was to be re-evaluated in 2019, however this was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Engagement of civil society

Communication by patient associations, ageing organizations and advocacy groups.

There is well-developed engagement particularly from civil society organizations serving older people, however there is little engagement from organizations serving other at-risk groups such as people with chronic cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases.

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International Federation on Ageing
1 Bridgepoint Drive, Suite G.238
Toronto, ON, M4M 2B5, Canada

www.vaccines4life.com

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