

Press Release

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Mandatory flu vaccination for all healthcare staff

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On 28 April this year, the French National Academy of Medicine came out in favour of making flu vaccination compulsory for all healthcare staff, including those in private practice, as well as carers in contact with vulnerable patients at risk of flu infection. The arguments supporting this position were set out in a report following the work of a working group (ref).

There are two key findings:

- (1) The severity of flu infections is greatly underestimated among the general public, even though each year they lead to a large number of GP visits, hospital admissions and deaths, particularly among vulnerable older people.
- (2) The recommendation for flu vaccination among healthcare workers is not being followed sufficiently, even though healthcare workers are concerned due to their occupational exposure: they can be a source of nosocomial flu. This is evidenced by the numerous clusters of flu reported each year in clinical departments, hospitals and care homes. In the event of infection, they expose hospitalised patients and care home residents, who live in confined spaces during the winter months. Furthermore, absenteeism among sick healthcare workers weakens already overburdened services during epidemic periods.

The argument put forward in this report is particularly strong, as it is based on ethical, legal and economic considerations:

- Medical responsibility is an obligation inherent in the choice of a healthcare profession. The individual freedom to decide to refuse vaccination is denying their medical responsibilities and their duties towards the patients in their care.

- States have the responsibility to ensure their citizens' right to enjoy the highest standard of health they are capable of achieving , particularly for the most vulnerable; the fight against epidemics is one of the obligations incumbent upon states and justifies the requirement for vaccination.
- The direct and indirect costs incurred by influenza infections each year are far higher than the costs of vaccinating healthcare workers; indeed, the strategy of mandatory vaccination for healthcare workers is economically justifiable.

In addition to recommending mandatory vaccination for ALL healthcare staff, the French Academy of Medicine recommends, on the grounds of fairness and effectiveness, that vaccination should be free of charge; it is the employer's responsibility to ensure and facilitate easy access and to put in place a regular monitoring. Communication strategies need to be adapted to the current context.

Patients must no longer be exposed to hospital-acquired flu.

In the context of budgetary constraints, it is time to recognise the benefits of a cost-effective prevention policy, by reducing expenditure related to influenza infection.

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