



3 May 2018

An open letter to:

Vytėnis Andriukaitis, Commissioner;

Xavier Prats Monné, Director-General;

Martin Seychell, Deputy Director-General;

Isabel de la Mata, Principal Advisor for Health and Crisis Management;

European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG-SANTE)

As authors of a new report, [A life-course approach to vaccination: adapting European policies](#), we applaud the European Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on strengthening European Union cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases. However, we are alarmed that people across Europe are needlessly suffering, and in some cases dying, from vaccine-preventable diseases. For example, despite the availability of vaccines, the number of new measles cases in Europe increased threefold between 2016 and 2017.¹

Vaccination is a cornerstone of public health and is critical to achieving 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It is arguably one of the most powerful and cost-effective methods we have to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. But sadly, its benefits are not always understood, and implementation is inconsistent. In OECD countries, less than 0.1% of health expenditure is spent on vaccination.² This is despite vaccinations being highly cost-effective. It costs less than €4,000 to protect someone against 17 different infectious diseases for their entire life.³

Traditionally, most countries in Europe have focused their vaccination programmes on young children and to some extent, older people – yet there is well-documented evidence to support the benefits of vaccinating people at key points throughout their lives.⁴ This is what is called a 'life-course approach'.

Vaccination across the life course has the potential to fundamentally and significantly improve the lives of billions of people across the world.

Specifically, it can:

- **bring enormous public health and socioeconomic benefits.** Vaccination across the life course contributes to lower healthcare costs, by reducing hospitalisation, and higher productivity through preventing illness among the workforce^{5 6}
- **offer protection to people with pre-existing health conditions.** For example, it can protect people with chronic disease from the life-threatening complications of infection
- **reduce illness and death among those who are not vaccinated**, through herd immunity. This was demonstrated by the introduction of meningococcal conjugate vaccination in young children and adolescents in the Netherlands, which contributed to a 93% reduction in meningococcal infection among unvaccinated groups⁷
- **reduce the spread of infection and subsequent need for medication, including antibiotics.** This will allow us to more effectively allocate our healthcare resources and contribute to the fight against antimicrobial resistance, which is responsible for 25,000 deaths in Europe per year and is a threat to every aspect of modern medicine.⁸



We would like to echo the European Commission's leadership in encouraging governments and the healthcare community to adopt a life-course approach to vaccination, in order to ensure a future-proof approach to vaccination policy. This will require public awareness campaigns, providing healthcare professionals with the tools and skills to discuss the benefits of a life-course approach with patients, integrating vaccination into non-healthcare settings such as schools and workplaces and, importantly, investing in more surveillance through effective immunisation information systems, data and research.

We call on all stakeholders to come together to implement concerted actions to ensure vaccination achieves its potential for future generations and remains a hallmark of successful prevention in years to come. We would be delighted to meet with you, to continue the conversation and discuss in detail the solutions needed to ensure that vaccination achieves its full potential for future generations in Europe.

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Aguado, ISGlobal;
Daphne Holt, Coalition for Life-course Immunisation;
Sam Nye, Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO);
David Salisbury, Centre on Global Health Security;
Jamie Wilkinson, Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU);
Alexandra Evans, The Health Policy Partnership;
Suzanne Wait, The Health Policy Partnership
(authors of *A life-course approach to vaccination: adapting European policies*)

<http://www.comomeningitis.org/projects/life-course-immunisation-initiative/may-2018-adapting-european-policies/>

The report *A life-course approach to vaccination: adapting European policies* was drafted by The Health Policy Partnership, based on desk research and interviews with leading experts in the field of vaccination. The contents were approved by all listed as authors. The Health Policy Partnership would also like to thank those listed in the report as contributors for their helpful input during interviews. The development of the report was initiated and funded by MSD. Experts were not paid for their time.

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