

Beat: Health

EP highlight health risks of falling vaccination rates in the EU

Call for greater transparency

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USPA NEWS - Epidemiological data show significant gaps in vaccines being accepted and coverage rates that are too low to ensure the public is properly protected against vaccine-preventable diseases, MEPs note with concern in a resolution voted on Thursday in the European Parliament.

Widespread and growing vaccine hesitancy is already having consequences such as avoidable measles outbreaks in a number of countries, they add. MEPs point out that vaccines are rigorously tested in multiple-stage trials and are regularly reassessed. They also welcome the forthcoming launch of a Joint Action, co-funded by the EU Health Program, to boost the number of people who have been vaccinated. They also urge the European Commission step up its support for national vaccination efforts.

MEPs advocate strengthening the EU legal basis for immunization coverage, and call on the EU Commission to facilitate a more harmonized and better-aligned schedule for vaccination across the EU. MEPs call for greater transparency in the production and evaluation of vaccines and their adjuvants, in the funding of independent research programs and about the possible side-effects of vaccines, so as to help restore trust in vaccination. They also point out that researchers must declare any conflict of interests and say that those who have them should be excluded from evaluation panels. The confidentiality of the deliberations of the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) evaluation panel should also be lifted, and scientific and clinical data be made public, they add.

MEPs also advocate opening a factual and science-based dialogue with civil society, in order to combat unreliable, misleading and unscientific information on vaccination. MEPs say it is unjustifiable that the cost of a full vaccines package for one child was 68 times more expensive in 2014 than in 2001. They support an existing agreement allowing vaccines to be jointly procured, thus pooling the purchasing power of member states.

Vaccination prevents an estimated 2.5 million deaths each year worldwide and reduces disease-specific treatment costs, including antimicrobial treatment, according to the resolution. MEPs note that there were 215,000 cases of Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs), excluding influenza, in Europe in 2008-2015.

Measles is a severe disease and since the start of 2016, 57 deaths due to it have been reported in the EU. According to the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC), most cases were reported by Romania (5,224), Italy (4,978), Greece (1,398) and Germany (906), between 1 February 2017 and 31 January 2018, accounting for 35%, 34%, 9% and 6%, respectively, of all cases reported by EU/EEA countries. Since 1 January 2018 seven deaths have been reported in 4 countries “ Romania (3), Italy (2), Greece (1) and France (1).

The EU Commission announced incentives to increase the uptake of diagnostics, antimicrobial alternatives and vaccines. The Commission is to present an initiative in the second quarter of 2018 for a strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases.

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