

# **Strategies and tools for primary care pediatricians to achieve a high vaccination rate in their practice and in the community.**

## **The revised ECPCP Velenje statement - how to deal with vaccination hesitancy in the community -**

We are concerned about the recent outbreaks of measles and the increasing vaccination hesitancy in European countries. The medical professionals and the pediatric team play a crucial role in the community to convince parents and adolescents about the benefits of routine immunizations. Children and adolescents have the fundamental right to receive the best medical care. Therefore, health authorities, parents and medical professionals should undertake all efforts to achieve high immunization coverage in order to prevent and control potentially devastating infectious diseases.

This statement has first been issued in 2017. It has now been revised in 2024 in order to address the most recent development of this matter due to the Covid pandemic.

1. Pediatricians and their associations should support laws and regulations for more mandatory vaccinations in their countries if the vaccination coverage is insufficient or decreasing. One way to reach high coverage of immunization beside public campaigns from health authorities is requirement of complete vaccinations before enrollment in kindergarten, school and university. Some countries (e.g. France, Italy, Slovenia, Turkey) introduced compulsory vaccinations since September 2017 which showed good effects.
2. Some health professionals (e.g. physicians, nurses, midwives) have doubts and increase parents uncertainties. Health authorities should take an active role in order to improve the adherence of all health professionals to national guidelines and professional regulations. Legal implications of professional's non-adherence to vaccination standards should be clarified. Check vaccination status of health workers regularly.
3. Participate in campaigns and local health fairs in the community with own presentations about the purpose of vaccinations. Be active in organizing training of other health care professionals and in informing the public in general. Improve evidence-based knowledge of health workers and teachers about immunizations.

4. Use every contact of families with health services as an opportunity to check immunization-status, to talk to parents and adolescents about vaccines and to complete missing vaccinations (WHO-recommendation). Check the vaccination status of parents. Be aware that one part of the problem of low vaccine coverage is explained by missed opportunities.
5. Make sure you have the appropriate communication skills. Take your time to listen carefully to concerns and fears of parents and adolescents. Provide special appointments to parents who are skeptical and doubtful about vaccinations in order to increase their confidence.
6. Clarify the role of false contra-indications for vaccinations such as banal viral infections and other irrelevant problems.
7. Do not discontinue patient care in case of vaccine refusal or hesitancy by parents and adolescents. Continuous patient-caretaker dialogue is important for trust in vaccinations. Explain consequences of vaccine-preventable diseases and provide written instructions to parents of non-vaccinated children.
8. Explain to parents and adolescents the role of media and internet where fake news, rumors, myths and inaccurate beliefs about vaccinations prevail and persist.
9. Provide reliable sources of information in the media and on the internet to parents and the pediatric team.
10. Use population-based and practice-based vaccine coverage rates in order to analyze the success of campaigns and other efforts to increase the coverage. Electronic registers can facilitate the documentation. We should support harmonization of vaccine schedules across Europe.

Statement endorsed by ECPCP in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 06/04/2024