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A Call to Action: Bridging the Adult Immunization Divide

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A Call to Action: Bridging the Adult Immunization Divide

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Over the past few years, as new diseases have emerged or reemerged, a host of new vaccines have become available while many others are in the pipeline. For older adults, many of whom have chronic diseases, vaccines play an important role in preventing infections and promoting health, yet uptake has been declining for certain vaccines.

To better understand what's behind this trend, we recently conducted a global survey of primary care physicians (PCPs) and infectious disease specialists working in a range of settings to gauge their level of understanding of immunizations, the challenges they face, and what they need to better engage their patients.

“Low vaccine uptake has been a significant public health issue for quite some time and one that requires a global response and better education for both clinicians and patients,” according to [Federico Martín-Torres MD, PhD](#), Head of Paediatrics, Director of Translational Paediatrics and Infectious Diseases at the [Hospital Clínico Universitario de Santiago](#), [Santiago, Chile](#)

Immunizations Are Critical, Yet Underutilized

People are living longer, and with age, comes the prevalence of chronic diseases, such as type-2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer.²

While immunizations are a critical way to ensure these populations stay healthy, our survey revealed that care gaps remain.

When asked which vaccines physicians recommended or administered in the past month, 80% cited vaccines for influenza and pneumococcal disease, while fewer cited those for COVID-19 (64%) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) (25%).

Still, 61% said they were very confident recommending the appropriate vaccine to patients and caregivers, and 46% said the same about addressing patient misconceptions and hesitations about vaccines. Unsurprisingly, more than half (54%) of physicians said the COVID-19 vaccine was met with the greatest hesitancy among patients.

Barriers to Immunization Uptake Persist

Suboptimal immunization rates are attributed to several factors, such as low awareness among providers and patients, access and equity issues, and misinformation.

Although physicians play a crucial role in improving rates, challenges, such as time constraints, competing priorities, lack of vaccine knowledge, and even personal beliefs and concerns, can come into play.

When physicians were asked about the vaccine-specific topics that are the most challenging to address, the following themes emerged:

- Identifying at-risk populations
- Communicating immunization benefits, efficacy, and safety
- Dispelling misinformation, fake news, and hesitancy
- Overcoming hesitancy of COVID-19 and RSV vaccines
- Raising awareness of new and emerging vaccines

“Vaccine hesitancy, in particular, continues to be a challenge, but educating both clinicians and the public will continue to be a vital way to preserve the unique health value of vaccinations,” Federico Martinon-Torres said.

Lack of Awareness of New and Emerging Vaccines

New and emerging vaccines against infections, such as RSV and human metapneumovirus (HMPV), are promising new tools to reduce morbidity and mortality among older adults.

However, when physicians were asked about their familiarity with approved and emerging vaccines, our survey revealed that awareness was low. In fact, only 29% were very familiar with the RSV vaccine. Plus, only about one-third (36%) were very familiar with the pentavalent meningitis and self-amplifying mRNA vaccines.

Physicians Need More Educational Opportunities

Our survey also revealed differences in clinical decision-making. For example, 68% said they are very confident in identifying high-risk patients who would benefit from vaccines, while less than half (43%) said the same about the coadministration of vaccines. Despite their confidence level, when asked about the level of importance of certain immunization topics for future educational activities, the majority of physicians (77%) still said identifying patients who are at high risk of disease and would benefit from vaccination was very important.

Other topics respondents cited included communicating the efficacy and safety of vaccines, improving their knowledge of vaccine guidelines and recommendations, and addressing vaccine hesitancy.

“Today’s physicians need more opportunities to access evidence-based, unbiased content that allows them to educate their patients about the importance of vaccines and empower them to engage in their care,”
according to [George Kassianos](#), CBE, MD (Hons), FRGCG.

Our survey insights demonstrate the limited awareness of new vaccines, the lack of confidence in administration, and challenges with patient hesitancy—all of which impact uptake.

As the vaccine landscape continues to evolve, independent medical education has a role to play in closing knowledge gaps. In fact, a recent case study we conducted found that among PCPs who received online continuing medical education/continuing education (CME/CE), 93% demonstrated improved performance associated with recommending available RSV vaccines for older adults. Medscape has launched 59 CME accredited programs with a vaccine or vaccine preventable disease lead topic between July 2023 and June 2025. To date, these programs have engaged over 770,000 learners. With a reach of 13M+ physicians globally, we deliver timely, data-driven education with precision to address clinical gaps. To learn more, visit Medscape.org.

Author:

[SHANTHI VOORN](#), PhD

Director of Clinical Strategy at Medscape Education Global

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