



**PGEU GPUE**

Pharmaceutical Group of European Union  
Groupement Pharmaceutique de l'Union Européenne

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## STATEMENT

### Flu vaccination 2021 – 2022: community pharmacists call to action

The approaching influenza season, combined with the persistence of COVID-19 across Europe, will offer another significant challenge for health systems across Europe. Several expert groups across the globe have warned that this year's flu season could be more severe than usual, mainly due to lower natural immunity of people as a consequence of the low circulation of the flu virus last year.<sup>1,2</sup> Moreover, it is expected that the flu virus circulation will return to pre-pandemic levels with the increasing relaxation of COVID-19 mitigation measures. Lastly, there is also the risk of lower flu vaccination uptake due to increased complacency resulting from the extremely low levels of flu circulation last year.

It is therefore urgent to put in place effective vaccination campaigns that can help preventing hospitalisations, ensuring adequate access and uptake of flu vaccines especially for at risk groups.

#### **Community pharmacists as key actors in flu vaccination strategies**

Community pharmacy organisations welcomed last year's increased efforts in several European countries to expand the involvement of pharmacists into national vaccination strategies and are ready to further advance their contribution. Community pharmacists are highly trained healthcare professionals and a trusted source of information. They can play a key role in identifying patients in at risk groups (elderly, patients with chronic diseases, immunocompromised etc.) and increasing public confidence in vaccination mainly today where the COVID-19 outbreak gave the opportunity to community pharmacists to play a pivotal role in explaining the fundamental importance of vaccination to the population. The high proximity of pharmacies within local communities offers also opportunities to increase access and convenience to vaccination by complementing established vaccination services.

Today, in 8 European countries<sup>3</sup> community pharmacists can administer flu vaccines to citizens in pharmacies. These services have demonstrated their potential to successfully reach people who had never been vaccinated for flu before and to increase overall vaccination delivery rates whilst showing high satisfaction rates from users.<sup>4</sup> In Ireland, survey results show that provision via Irish community pharmacies increases coverage for people who had never received the vaccination before (one in six), with 99% of patients indicating that they would return to the pharmacy for their next vaccination. Patient satisfaction with the service is very positive with 93% of patients rating the service either 9/10 or 10/10.<sup>5</sup> In France, community pharmacists vaccinated more than 3,7 million people against the flu between mid-October 2020 and the beginning of January 2021, meaning 1 flu vaccination out of 3 was performed by community pharmacists.

Moreover, community pharmacists in 7 European countries<sup>6</sup>, most recently in Italy and Poland, have been enabled to administer COVID-19 vaccines in pharmacies after having followed the required training programme, and several other European countries are conducting pilots to evaluate the implementation of pharmacy-based immunisation services. In addition, in some European countries, pharmacists have increased access to flu vaccination by expanding powers in relation to the dispensing of flu vaccinations, including the supply of flu vaccines to at risk groups without the prior need for a prescription.<sup>7</sup>

### **PGEU Call to Action**

To mitigate the anticipated negative impact of the upcoming influenza season on citizens' health and healthcare systems, PGEU calls on European, national and regional health authorities to:

- **Secure sufficient flu vaccination uptake and trust** by deploying adequate information campaigns and calls for vaccination which structurally involve healthcare professionals as trusted sources for the public.
- **Strengthen collaboration with community pharmacists and pharmacy organisations** as key partners to help increasing trust in vaccines, fighting vaccine hesitancy and achieving higher uptake overall within local communities.
- **Ensure high accessibility and convenience to flu vaccination** by broadening opportunities for vaccination through the structural use of the widely accessible network of pharmacies where appropriate and guaranteeing an adequate supply of vaccines to the needs of the population.

### **References**

1. Academy of National Sciences report *COVID-19: Preparing for the future - Looking ahead to winter 2021/22 and beyond*, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, accessible [here](#).
  2. Financial Times *US and Europe brace for winter flu outbreaks as social distancing ends*, August 6<sup>th</sup>, accessible [here](#).
  3. Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
  4. PGEU Best Practice Paper on Antimicrobial Resistance, accessible [here](#).
  5. Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland report *Patient Feedback on the Flu Vaccination Service Provided in Pharmacies*, accessible [here](#).
  6. France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
  7. PGEU Position Paper on the Role of Community Pharmacists in COVID-19 - Lessons Learned from the Pandemic, accessible [here](#).
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