

medical personnel and people who, regardless of age, have a particularly high risk of a severe course of an infection because of a pre-existing underlying disease.

Vaccination coverage has been stagnating in Germany in recent years; in the target groups it has even declined slightly (Blank et al. 2009). The development of influenza vaccination rates over recent years shows that in some cases they have been greatly influenced by external factors, e. g. the discussions on avian influenza (H5N1 virus) or the so-called swine influenza (the pandemic H1N1 virus in 2009). For example, the observed high vaccination coverage of the general population in the 2005/06 season (33 %) was probably due to intense media reporting on avian influenza in 2005 (Blank et al. 2008).

Particularly low vaccination rates were observed in the 2009 GEDA study among health care workers. These results are consistent with other studies, which have also reported a low influenza immunization coverage of this target group. In a study comparing influenza vaccination coverage in the five most populous EU countries, medical staff in Germany were found to have a vaccination rate of 17 % in the 2007/08 season (Blank et al. 2009). Efforts should be made to increase vaccine uptake in this target group, because people who work in the medical field are more vulnerable to being infected with the virus themselves because of their contact with influenza patients. Moreover, medical staff can be an infection risk for the unvaccinated, perhaps especially vulnerable patient groups they look after. In addition, medical staff have a key role to play when it comes to reminding people of the annual influenza vaccination, explaining the benefits and risks of vaccination, and in this way helping patients to make a decision on this issue.

As in previous studies (e. g. Wiese-Posselt et al. 2006; Rehmet et al. 2002) significantly higher influenza vaccination rates were also observed in the 2009 GEDA study among people living in East Germany. The differences between east and west are found both in the 60+ age group and among younger people. The significantly higher level of acceptance of influenza vaccination in the east of the country can perhaps be seen as an after-effect of the state-organized system of vaccination prevention in the GDR, where influenza vaccination was recommended for people with an increased health risk or a higher risk of exposure, and for the working population. The aim was the complete vaccination of these groups (RKI 2009; Dittmann, Thilo 1986).

In order to increase influenza vaccination coverage in Germany, it is necessary to launch new target-group-oriented vaccination campaigns, or to intensify existing campaigns. Such campaigns depend on the population receiving continuous and reliable information on influenza and the vaccination against it. An especially promising approach towards vaccination coverage is to sensitize healthcare professionals as key multipliers for the subject of influenza vaccination (Wortberg et al. 2009). For

example, existing education campaigns for medical staff (e. g. as part of the German vaccination campaign called »Wir kommen der Grippe zuvor«, BZgA 2011) could be intensified. Studies show that being advised by doctors to get vaccinated against influenza is the most effective motivation for people (Wiese-Posselt et al. 2006).

To create a basis for the efficient planning of measures, it is essential to evaluate the success of such campaigns on an annual basis using a suitable method. Representative telephone surveys like the GEDA study can be used for this purpose. They provide valuable, readily available data on the vaccination status of adults and also make it possible to link vaccination data with socio-demographic characteristics for more in-depth analyses. Information can be deduced from this about possible barriers to high vaccination rates and possible starting points for targeted interventions.

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Other useful links:

For a wide range of information on the subject of vaccination, see Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA):
<http://www.impfen-info.de> (german version only)

Robert Koch Institute's answers to FAQs on seasonal influenza vaccination at:

http://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Infekt/Impfen/FAQ/InfluenzaSaisonalPandemisch/faq__tab.html (last revised: 02.12.2010) (german version only)

Influenza Working Group:

<http://www.influenza.rki.de> (german version only)

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