



volume 12 issue3

March 2011

Home Page

[Back to Home Page »](#)

Contents

Participants sought for follow-on European study into infections at long term care facilities

Disturbing decline in uptake of meningitis vaccines continues

Fewer older people availing of influenza vaccine

HPSC launches new look website

Latest HPSC reports

Editorial Board

Dr D O'Flanagan, HPSC (Managing editor)
 Dr L Kyne, RCPI (Paed)
 Prof C Bradley, ICGP
 Dr N O'Sullivan, ISCM
 Mr E O'Kelly, NVRL
 Dr P McKeown, HPSC
 Dr L Thornton, FPHMI
 Prof C Bergin, IDSI
 M Kelly, HPSC (Editor)

Health Protection Surveillance Centre

25-27 Middle Gardiner St
 Dublin 1

Tel: +353 (0) 1 8765300
 Fax: +353 (0) 1 8561299
info@hpsc.ie
www.hpsc.ie

Contents of Epi Insight should not be reproduced without permission.

© HPSC, 2011. All rights reserved

Fewer older people availing of influenza vaccine

In Ireland, annual influenza vaccination is recommended for adults and children who are at risk of influenza-related complications, including all persons 65 years of age and older. Influenza and its related illnesses remain a major cause of preventable morbidity and mortality in older people worldwide. Among older people, vaccination is thought to reduce influenza-related morbidity by 50-60% and influenza-related mortality by 70-80%.¹

Influenza vaccination (both vaccine and administration) is free for all medical cardholders and GP visit cardholders in Ireland. From mid-2001 to the end of 2008, all individuals aged 70 years and older were eligible for a medical card. Since 1st January 2009, automatic entitlement to a medical card for those aged 70 years and older no longer applies. All those aged over 70 years who now apply for a medical card are subject to a means test based on income. On August 1st 2010, 425,445 (90.9%) of the population aged 65 years or older had either a medical card or a GP visit card (source: Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) and 2006 CSO population census). Approximately, 57.8% of the population aged 65 to 69 years have a medical card or a GP visit card. GP visit cards have been available since mid-2006.

In 2004, a study was undertaken in Ireland to measure influenza vaccine uptake among medical cardholders (aged 65 years or older) for the 2003/2004-influenza season.² This study has been repeated for each influenza season since, to determine influenza vaccine uptake among medical cardholders (aged 65 years or older). The study was expanded in 2006 to include GP visit cardholders.

Methodology

Information was obtained from the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS), HSE- Finance Shared Services on the number of registered medical cardholders and GP visit cardholders aged 65 years and older, as well as the number of patients vaccinated with the seasonal influenza vaccine (by age group and HSE area) during the 2009/2010-influenza season. Data refers to GP returns received by the PCRS between September 2009 and August 2010. Seasonal influenza vaccine uptake rates by age group and HSE area were calculated based on the average number of registered patients with medical cards and GP visit cards during this time period.

Results

All data refer to seasonal influenza vaccine uptake in medical cardholders and GP visit cardholders only. This study did not include pandemic influenza vaccine uptake data. The average uptake for seasonal influenza vaccination nationally during the 2009/2010-influenza season in those aged 65 years and older was 53.8%. This is a marked decrease compared with an average uptake rate of 70.1% during the 2008/2009-influenza season.³ Variation in vaccination coverage was observed between HSE areas (range: 51.6%-56.4%) (figure 1).

Subscribe

Enter your email address in the box below to receive an email each time we post a new issue of our newsletter.

Email Address:

Email Format:

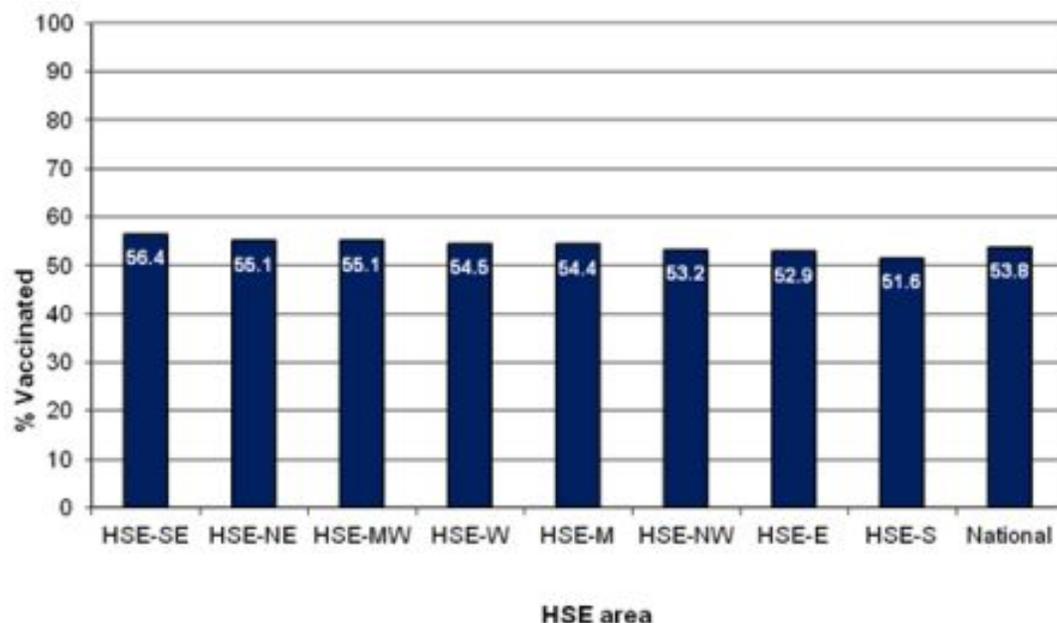


Figure 1. Percentage of medical cardholders and GP visit cardholders (65 years of age and older) who received seasonal influenza vaccine during the 2009/2010-influenza season, by HSE Area.

Nationally, the highest uptake (57.4%) of seasonal influenza vaccine among older people was in those aged 75 years of age and older (ranging from 59.9%-54.8% across all HSE areas). The lowest national uptake (44.5%) was in the 65-69 year age group (ranging from 48.0% - 42.2% across all HSE areas) (table 1).

Table 1. National average seasonal influenza immunisation uptake by influenza season (2003/2004-2009/2010) and by age group in years

| Age Group (years) | 2003/2004 | 2004/2005 | 2005/2006 | 2006/2007 | 2007/2008 | 2008/2009 | 2009/2010 |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 65-69 | 51.6 | 49.1 | 52.9 | 50.2 | 51.0 | 55.8 | 44.5 |
| 70-74 | 58.7 | 57.6 | 61.5 | 59.2 | 60.0 | 69.7 | 53.2 |
| 75+ | 67.3 | 67.4 | 66.9 | 64.7 | 66.1 | 75.1 | 57.4 |
| 65+ | 62.0 | 61.4 | 63.0 | 60.6 | 61.7 | 70.1 | 53.8 |

Discussion

In Ireland, the average seasonal influenza vaccination uptake rate for the 2009/2010-influenza season among medical cardholders and GP visit cardholders aged 65 years of age and older was 53.8%, a marked decrease on the reported uptake rate of 70.1% for the 2008/2009-influenza season and from the mean uptake rate (61.8%) for the last seven influenza seasons.³ This is the lowest uptake rate reported since seasonal influenza vaccine uptake surveillance was initiated during the 2003/2004-influenza season.

The reason for the decrease in uptake during the 2009/2010-influenza season is not yet clear. It is likely that the intense media coverage surrounding the 2009/2010 influenza pandemic and the vaccination campaign against pandemic influenza affected *seasonal* influenza uptake rates for the 2009/2010 influenza season. It is possible that people were more likely to receive the pandemic influenza vaccine rather than the seasonal influenza vaccine and particularly so as the pandemic influenza strain was the principal circulating influenza strain. The vaccination campaign against pandemic influenza started in November 2009, just one month later than the commencement of seasonal influenza vaccination campaign. A vaccine effectiveness

study on pandemic influenza A (H1N1 2009) vaccine during the 2009/2010 influenza season indicated a 68% effectiveness rate for this vaccine.⁴

Vaccination data are collated by the PCRS by date of payment claim rather than date of vaccination; it is therefore possible that not all payment claims for vaccines administered in 2009/2010 influenza season were submitted for payment at this time.

A study of various European countries during the 2006/2007-influenza season reported uptake rates in older people ranging from 1.8%-82.1%.⁵ The Council of the European Union issued a formal recommendation on seasonal influenza vaccine in December 2009.⁶ Their recommendations included a target of 75% seasonal influenza vaccine uptake in older age groups and people with chronic medical conditions prior to the 2014/2015-influenza season or earlier. The European recommendation also includes prioritising the provision of education, training and information exchange on seasonal influenza and vaccination to health care workers, risk groups and their families and the removal of obstacles to influenza vaccination uptake. The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a target of 75% for influenza vaccine uptake in those aged 65 years and older, to be reached by 2010 (an increase from the 50% WHO target that was set for 2006). Our study indicates that we have not reached these targets and must strive to do so by adopting the European recommendation.

Although influenza vaccine is recommended for all individuals 65 years of age and older in Ireland, it is evident that there is inconsistent uptake amongst this group. However, it should be noted that data for the 65-69 year age group only represent medical and GP visit cardholders in this age group and therefore do not include 42% of the population in this age group. The uptake in this group is unknown.

Reasons for inadequate vaccination uptake rates, particularly among those aged 65-74 years are unclear. A national telephone survey of risk groups and the uptake of influenza and pneumococcal vaccine in Ireland was conducted in 2006⁷ and was repeated in 2010 (unpublished data). The 2006 survey estimated seasonal influenza vaccine uptake among persons aged 65 years and older at 68.6%, reaching the 2006 WHO target. A similar survey was repeated in 2010 in which 63.5% of individuals aged 65 years and older reported seasonal influenza vaccination in the 2009/2010 season, higher than that reported from PCRS data but less than the European recommendation and WHO target for 2010. Reasons cited for not getting the seasonal influenza vaccination in both surveys was a perception of low risk of getting influenza. The influence of family doctors in recommending vaccine is evident from both surveys, with the majority of respondents stating that they would get the vaccine if recommended by their doctor.⁷ Other studies have also reported the cost of vaccination, lack of awareness of self-risk associated with influenza disease, as well as distrust of vaccinations, disbelief in vaccine efficacy and inadequate strength of recommendations from health professionals as possible reasons for inadequate vaccination uptake.^{5, 8, 9, 10, 11}

Key points

- Influenza vaccine uptake for those aged 65 years or older during the 2009/2010 season showed a marked decrease in comparison to the 2008/2009 season, and is well below the WHO target of 75% uptake.
- In Ireland, influenza vaccination uptake rates among medical cardholders and GP visit cardholders aged 65 years of age and older show regional and age group variation.
- Health professionals should encourage and facilitate access to vaccination for their at-risk patients, including all patients 65 years of age and older.
- Work on increasing awareness within the wider community about the value of influenza vaccination for those at risk of influenza complications should be supported as part of efforts to increase vaccine coverage.
- The need for a national immunisation register is ever more relevant in order to estimate more timely and complete influenza vaccination uptake rates in risk groups, individuals aged 65 years and older and health care workers.
- Projects need to be developed to promote influenza vaccination uptake among health care workers

as recommended by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).¹²

Lisa Domegan, Joan O'Donnell, Suzanne Cotter, Jolita Mereckiene and Darina O'Flanagan, HPSC.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Ger Manning, Pamela Doherty, Orlaith Browne, and Sheila Greene of the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (HSE-Finance Shared Services) for data provided for this study.

References

1. WHO. Influenza vaccines. *WER* 2000; **75**: 281-288.
2. Sheahan A, Cotter S. Influenza vaccination uptake. *Epi-Insight* 2004; **5**(11): 1.
3. Sarah Jackson, Joan O'Donnell, Darina O'Flanagan, HPSC. More older people availing of seasonal influenza vaccine *Epi-Insight* 2010; **11**(2).
4. Barret Ann-Sophie et al. Effectiveness of swine flu vaccine measured. Forum. October 2010.
5. Mereckiene J, Cotter S, Nicoll A, Lévy-Bruhl D, Ferro A, Tridente G, Zanoni G, Berra P, Salmaso S, O'Flanagan D, O'Flanagan D, on behalf of the VENICE project gatekeepers group. National Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Survey in Europe, 2008. *Euro Surveill.* 2008;**13**(43) Available [here](#).
6. Nicoll A. A new decade, a new seasonal influenza: the Council of the European Union Recommendation on seasonal influenza vaccination. *Euro Surveill.* 2010;**15**(1):pii=19458. Available [here](#).
7. Mereckiene J, O'Donnell J, Collins C, Cotter S, Igoe D, O'Flanagan D. Risk groups and uptake of influenza and pneumococcal vaccine in Ireland. *Euro Surveill.* 2007;**12**(12). Available [here](#).
8. Kaufman Z, Green MS. Compliance with influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations in Israel, 1999-2002. *Public Health Rev* 2003; **31**(1): 71-9.
9. Lewis-Parmar H, McCann R. Achieving national influenza vaccine targets - an investigation of the factors affecting influenza vaccine uptake in older people and people with diabetes. *Commun Dis Public Health* 2002; **5**(2): 119-26.
10. Cornford CS, Morgan M. Elderly people's beliefs about influenza vaccination. *Br J Gen Pract* 1999; **49**(441): 281-4.
11. Canova L *et al.* Prevalence rate and reasons for refusals of influenza vaccine in elderly. *Swiss Med Wkly* 2003; **133**(43-44): 598-602.
12. Nicoll A, Ciancio BC, Tsovala S, Blank PR, Yilmaz C. The scientific basis for offering seasonal influenza immunisation to risk groups in Europe. *Euro Surveill.* 2008;**13**(43)

TELL A FRIEND

The views expressed in Epi Insight are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of HPSC. All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that all information is accurate at the time of publication. The HPSC will not be liable for any loss, injury or incidental special, indirect or consequential damage or defamation arising out of, or in connection with, Epi Insight or other material derived from, or referred to in the publication.

Created with
[Newsweaver](#)