

INFLUENZA VACCINE COVERAGE IN CHILDREN AGED <5 YEARS IN POLAND DURING 2004-2008

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Introduction: Routine vaccination of certain groups of persons, including children, might provide additional protection to persons at risk for influenza complications and reduce the overall influenza burden. According to Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations from July 2008, vaccination against influenza should be recommended to all persons in whom vaccination is not contraindicated for health reasons. The main new recommendation from the ACIP involves influenza vaccination for children from 6 months to 18 years of age, however a routine vaccination of children between the ages of 6 and 59 months should continue to be a primary focus of influenza prevention because these children are at higher risk for complications of influenza. In Europe recommendations for children vaccinations are different, but generally vaccination against influenza is recommended to children younger than 5 years (in Austria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia). Vaccination against influenza has been included to the Polish schedule of vaccinations since 1994 - as a recommended one (it is chosen and paid by a patient, without any reimbursement). Vaccination is recommended to adults older than 55 years and persons (including children) with chronic medical conditions (respiratory, cardiovascular, kidney diseases, immunodeficiencies). Objective: The aim of the paper was to estimate the influenza vaccine coverage in children aged 0-5 years and >65 years in Poland during 2004-2008.

Material and Methods: Official data collected by National Institute of Hygiene, National Institute of Public Health and Central Statistical Office were analyzed. These data, concerning number of doses of vaccines given to patients and age of vaccinated persons, are collected from reports prepared by Sanitary-Epidemiological Stations on the local levels. Data for these reports are supported from medical records by general practitioners who perform vaccinations in their practices. The vaccine coverage rate was calculated as a percentage of vaccinated individuals among all individuals at respective age (<5 years).

Results: Number of vaccinations against influenza in children aged 0-4 years ranged from 19,834 shots (in 2007) to 34,262 shots (in 2005) and has remained stable and at very low level so far. Among vaccinations performed in all persons, the percentage of vaccinations made in children age 0-4 years varied from 1.6% (in 2007) to 2% (in 2005). The influenza vaccination coverage in this age group of population ranged from 1.1% (in 2008) to 1.9% (in 2005).

Conclusions: The influenza vaccination coverage among Polish children aged 0-4 years is low (1-2%) and persisted on the same level in 2004-2006. It is interesting that the highest number of administered influenza vaccine was observed in 2005 when avian influenza virus was reported among swans in Poland - that might have been a possible reason of an increased interest in influenza vaccination among parents of young children. It may be expected that

higher coverage rates will be observed in 2009 pandemic year. More educational activities directed both to patients (parents) and health care workers would be needed to improve a general knowledge about influenza vaccination benefits among young children.