

Respiratory infections

Public perception of the risks associated with infectious diseases in Poland: Ebola and influenza, and their impact on the attitudes to vaccination

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While the Ebola outbreak in 2014 was strongly highlighted in mainstream media and perceived as a threat to public health in Poland, influenza was regarded as a triviality and the vaccination coverage was low. By analysing feedback from an on-line questionnaire we were able to assess the knowledge concerning Ebola and influenza together with attitudes to immunizations of 544 people (77% aged 21-40 years; 73% women; 74% with master degree; 45% medical staff) during influenza season (November 2014 - January 2015).

Results showed that 92,6% of people declared that they would get vaccinated before traveling to endemic regions if vaccine against Ebola existed but adverse reactions (fever and injection pain), high costs and low effectiveness of the vaccine would adversely affect this decision. While 84,2% respondents were aware of influenza attributing significantly to the cause of death, only 65,4% considered influenza as an actual dangerous disease for people in Poland and 46,7% thought that Poland is not an endemic region for flu. Nearly 23% declared they were already vaccinated against flu and 11,4% declared they were going to vaccinate. The majority of respondents (66,9%) pointed to influenza as the disease with more death victims during 2014/2015 season but 67,5% of respondents were not going to be vaccinated against influenza.

We conclude that the perceived risk of infectious disease is an important determinant when deciding to vaccinate, however, negative information about the vaccine, like adverse reactions, high cost and low effectiveness are important factors influencing such a decision.