

Advancing pharmacy practices in vaccination: Preparing for winter

Report from a FIP
insight board

2024



FIP Development Goals



International
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Colophon

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1 Introduction

As winter approaches in different parts of the globe, the anticipation of colder temperatures and the onset of seasonal illnesses underscores the importance of proactive healthcare measures. Winter is particularly known for the increase in cases of diseases caused by respiratory viruses but also by other pathogens that take advantage of our reduced immune system response.

The role of pharmacies in promoting community health has expanded in past years with the development of different immunisation roles for pharmacists. Especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies have become integral hubs for preventive care, offering convenient access to immunisations. In some countries pharmacists have also been involved in safeguarding patients' health by supporting efforts to deliver vaccines against the seasonal flu.

This report, resulting from an insight board that FIP hosted in October 2023, aims to shed light on the multifaceted approach undertaken by pharmacies to meet the increased demand for immunisations during winter, considering factors such as vaccine availability, staff training, public awareness campaigns and collaborative efforts with healthcare stakeholders. At the insight board, experts in the field of immunisation discussed vaccination and preparing for winter and shared valuable insights for pharmacists, healthcare professionals, policymakers and the general public to better understand and appreciate the vital role of pharmacies in increasing uptake of different vaccines, especially during winter periods.

The proposed questions for this discussion were:

- How does the approach to vaccination change during the winter months to address the increased risk of flu and other communicable diseases?
- What are the key logistical preparations that need to be made to ensure the smooth delivery of vaccinations during winter?
- Can you share examples of successful strategies for promoting and managing flu vaccinations during the winter season in a pharmacy setting?
- How can we educate patients and communities about the importance of winter vaccinations, particularly in the context of communicable diseases?

FIP's work on vaccination is aimed at improving vaccination coverage and promoting a life-course approach to vaccination which are global imperatives to which pharmacists can greatly contribute. Of the 21 [FIP Development Goals](#) launched in September 2020, vaccination is linked to 17 goals, which clearly indicates the high priority vaccination holds not only for pharmacy and FIP, but also for global health. Development Goal 16 (Communicable diseases), is overtly linked to the prevention of this group of diseases, in which vaccination plays a prominent role. FIP has also been developing a variety of resources related to vaccination that can be found at the [FIP Prevention webpage](#).

It should be noted that the views expressed during the insight board are those of the individuals based on their expertise and experience. They do not represent FIP policy or positions, although they may build on existing positions and statements. Reports from FIP insight boards seek to provide qualitative viewpoints and descriptive observations, not generalisable or global or fully evidenced report. These findings can inform further policy development or confirm positions already held but they do not occupy the status of a full FIP report. FIP will use the insights in this report to consider what further support will be required by pharmacists to support evidence-based decision making and appropriate patient-centred care. With that in mind, this report delves into the critical aspect of preparing for winter through pharmacy-based immunisation initiatives.

2 Approaches to vaccination during winter months to address the increased risk of flu and other communicable diseases.

In the southern hemisphere, flu vaccinations typically start around the end of March, just before the arrival of the cold months. For the northern hemisphere this promotion occurs approximately in the end of September (approximately six months apart, depending on the country location). In Australia, this is when the national programme becomes available and community pharmacies can receive vaccines slightly earlier than the government programme, allowing them to be one of the first places to engage in vaccination promotion campaigns. In the US, the autumn and winter are considered ideal times for flu vaccines and there is also recognition of the potential for vaccinating against other non-seasonal diseases, such as shingles.

“Our peak period for flu here [in Australia] is in August. So, we have that window of opportunity to really try to get to the group that community pharmacies are trying to target, but our nationally funded programme hasn’t picked up through general practice.”

“We often think of fall as the time we vaccinate.”

In Australia, strategies include the use of shelf talkers, dispensing bag flyers and early changes to prescription dispensing covers, besides the use of a booking system to encourage early flu programme bookings. The focus is on targeting the pharmacy customers and aim to get them to think about getting COVID-19, RSV and flu vaccines as all those flu seasons require better community awareness about the importance of vaccinations in previous seasons.

“Pharmacies use a booking system to get people to book early into the flu programme and so most pharmacies and pharmacy groups will have a booking system as well as running walk-in programmes in their pharmacies.”

In the US, current efforts are focused on educating individuals about the recent RSV vaccines and emphasising the need for vaccines beyond flu and COVID-19, especially for at-risk groups like young children and the elderly. The approach involves raising awareness about the availability of the RSV vaccine and stressing its importance in vulnerable populations.

“It’s stressful, the need now for more than just the flu vaccine and COVID-19, particularly for at-risk groups. The challenge with that is making sure individuals understand that all new viruses that have been around do cause problems.”

In Uruguay, a pilot plan is under way to introduce flu vaccinations in community pharmacies. The plan includes informing pharmacy staff through courses, preparing promotional materials like flyers, and encouraging patients to bring vaccination records. Though in the early stages, this initiative aims to gradually incorporate vaccine discussions into patient interactions.

“We here give patients a document to check the vaccines they have already received. So, when introducing the new service, we are asking the patient to come with the document and to talk about vaccines.”

In Lebanon, early flu vaccination initiatives start in September. The Lebanese Order of Pharmacists provides intensive courses for community pharmacists, emphasising the importance of being knowledgeable about the flu vaccine. This initiative is seen as an opportunity not only to discuss vaccines but also to address non-communicable diseases and topics like antimicrobial resistance.

“Pharmacists should attend the Lebanese Order of Pharmacists courses because it is important for them to be at ease whenever they are going to talk about the flu vaccine.”

There is a collective emphasis on the importance of population health and protecting vulnerable individuals through flu vaccination. Continuous messaging about the value of vaccines, especially in countries like Canada with free access to vaccines, is highlighted through pharmacies. Outreach efforts, such as taking flu vaccinations beyond pharmacies to personal care homes and long-term care facilities, were also suggested at the insight board.

“Charging costs might be a barrier in some areas, and maybe some countries make flu vaccinations, and the people don't know that. So constant messaging of the value of getting the vaccine from the local pharmacy is important, especially when there is no charge for it.”

3 Key logistical preparations to ensure the smooth delivery of vaccines during winter

In the NHS in England, hospitals face the challenge of reaching pharmacy staff who may stay within their departments and do not work collaboratively. Expanding the workforce of vaccinators within the pharmacy profession is suggested to enhance vaccine advocacy and increase vaccination rates among pharmacy staff.

“Sometimes the pharmacy departments could be quite insular, so a lot of staff stay within the pharmacy department and don't leave. Getting them to vaccinate outside of the department is tricky.”

Experiences from the US take us to an academic perspective of vaccine clinics for students. The emphasis is on ensuring vaccines reach individuals who need them, especially considering lower vaccination rates for younger individuals.

“The important part is, at least in the US, the vaccination rates for flu for individuals aged 18 to 49 are on the lower end, not closer to the 70% target.”

In New Zealand, some strategies for vaccine promotion include recalling patients, targeting those with chronic conditions, utilising booking systems, and aligning with other providers. Clear messaging, optimisation of staff understanding, and building confidence in vaccines were also emphasised.

“Making sure that there's a consistent messaging to raise awareness on when they're going to have their vaccines available as well as on what the strategies are going to be for their vaccination.”

The importance of manpower was also emphasised, utilising pharmacy students for vaccine administration and considering opportunities for vaccinations outside the pharmacy. Support for outreach efforts to locations like long-term care facilities, workplaces and schools could also be another important logistic aspect for winter vaccinations. During the COVID-19 pandemic the military was an important logistical support to the delivery of vaccines in some countries across the globe, as for example in Uruguay.

“Look at the opportunities to get the vaccinations done outside the pharmacy because not everyone can come into the pharmacy for the vaccination. There are communities where the pharmacist or any individual could go into and do a vaccination day.”

Adaptive strategies for diverse healthcare settings, such as mobile units and door-to-door campaigns with parental consent, are highlighted in Lebanon's experiences, particularly in reaching vulnerable populations like refugees.

“For the refugees, the Ministry of Public Health has made for some time before getting this primary healthcare centre that are taking care of them for the vaccination. They had the mobile unit car where someone such as a nurse will be able to go to their camps to vaccinate them.”

4 Successful strategies for promoting and managing flu vaccinations during winter in a pharmacy settings

In West Africa, seasonal flu, known as Qata, coincides with the Harmattan (dry and cold) and rainy seasons (hotter). Vaccination efforts target specific groups, including children, sickle cell disease patients, and adults aged 55 years and above. Pneumococcal vaccines are commonly administered to those with sickle cell disease. Further work can be done on a global policy and preparation for pharmacy practitioners to enhance the impact and visibility of flu vaccinations, especially in Africa.

The need for simple and consistent messages aligned with government or jurisdictional messaging was emphasised by some participants. Leveraging the sense of community value and tapping into the success of initial COVID-19 messaging could be also important as the goal is to convey the importance of protecting oneself to protect others.

“The original public health messaging was around herd immunity. The more people we reach, the better the vaccine awareness is within the community and the greater chance we have to protect not only our family, but other people at risk.”

Success in England’s community pharmacies is highlighted as they are involved in administering more flu vaccines than general practice. Offering free flu vaccines for those eligible through their GP, coupled with affordable prices, has been effective. Private providers, both large and small, use individual patient campaigns and sometimes integrate flu vaccine promotion with other services.

“There are a lot of private providers now. I think one of the things that helped with the promotional side and getting people into pharmacy was offering it for free for those who would normally qualify for it. But the price of it is cheap anyway as a service. So, there’s good evidence from the UK to show that people are willing to pay.”

Spain’s experience includes classical leaflets and successful social media campaigns, especially on WhatsApp. Dispelling myths and conducting quizzes on social media channels have proven successful, highlighting the importance of reaching people where they are.

“That works very well, especially when we upload pictures of us. The classic picture of us showing our shoulder being injected, and we’ve done some quizzes in the past regarding vaccination and misinformation.”

A successful strategy involves taking vaccines to where people are, making it convenient for them. Advocacy for mainstream media support includes front-page coverage and press releases to announce the availability of flu vaccines. Lebanon’s approach utilises door posters, patient calls and social media groups to raise awareness and make community pharmacies central to flu vaccine awareness.

“We need the support of the mainstream media such as having the front page of newspapers. The newspaper can announce when vaccines are available.”

“Lots of community pharmacists have a medical record of their patients and they start from August, calling them and telling them: hey, just a kind reminder that we’re going to have the flu vaccine available. We just wanted to tell you that you and your family should take the vaccine.”

5 Education of patients and communities about the importance of winter vaccinations

Community outreach strategies include health fairs, educational events and engagement in malls and shopping areas. Pharmacy students play a key role in educating the community, utilising their approachability and the potential to draw people into conversations. Efforts extend to at-risk populations and areas with limited pharmacy access, with faculty involvement crucial for building trust and promoting the importance of seasonal and recommended vaccines.

“We have health fairs for the students on campus, but then there are also students taking information out to malls and shopping areas, particularly during the buildup to the flu season, just to educate the community.”

Regulatory limitations in certain regions impact the ability of community pharmacies to administer vaccines as patients might be available to receive the vaccine but must still go to another location to receive it. Designing logos and providing promotional items contribute to marketing efforts aimed at encouraging patients to seek vaccination services in community pharmacies.

“We have some patients that are going to buy the vaccines in the community pharmacy. When the vaccine arrives, we also text and send an e-mail saying that we are having the new vaccine and of course we must arrange with the practitioner to go to their home to give the vaccine.”

The focus on adult vaccination has gained prominence, emphasising the vulnerability of this demographic. Implementation of adult immunisation registers helps track and review vaccination statuses, offering an opportunity to address gaps in adult vaccination rates. Strategic educational campaigns aim to bridge the disparity in vaccination rates between childhood and adulthood.

“Because of necessity we are moving from having a childhood immunisation register to also adult immunisation registers nationally, which means that now all vaccinations are available when seeing any health provider within the country.”

Cultural competence is recognised as vital in vaccine promotion. Tailoring materials to specific cultural contexts is key to ensuring effective communication. Social media and faith groups are leveraged to engage diverse communities, emphasising trust-building through familiar voices and messages. Emphasis is placed on the need not only to translate words but also on cultural nuances for equitable outreach.

“They were translating directly from English, but it wasn’t translating culturally, and people weren’t engaging with that as well.”

Continuous communication remains crucial in promoting vaccine awareness through various channels, including traditional newspapers and social media. The focus is on reminding individuals about the severity of vaccine-preventable diseases and encouraging them to stay informed about vaccine availability.

“We need to continually talk to patients using all the channels that are available about how the safety and efficacy of vaccines that we have available for seasonal respiratory viruses and to remind them about how bad the diseases are.”

In Spain, efforts involve presentations in patient associations and schools to stress the importance of vaccination. The use of materials provided by professional associations could be a good support to present a united front in advocating expanded pharmacy vaccination roles.

“Our national or regional professional associations provide us with the materials such as slides and leaflets, and we just go and present those to patients.”

Efforts are under way to incorporate immunisation education into undergraduate pharmacy curricula to better prepare future pharmacists for real-world practice.

“Something good is happening here in Lebanon at pharmacy schools because now they are understanding that practice is not only memorising what the vaccines are. They understand now that immunisation is really a whole area of practice which need a good infrastructure and logistics.”

6 "Preparing for winter: Pharmacy-based vaccination strategies: Digital event summary

FIP hosted a series of three digital events “Advancing pharmacy practices in vaccination” following this insight board which was aimed to provide insights into three key topics to advance pharmacy-based vaccination services: Vaccine confidence, preparing for winter, and reaching at-risk and vulnerable groups. The second episode of the series ["Preparing for winter: Pharmacy-based vaccination strategies"](#) focuses on equipping pharmacy professionals with the knowledge and tools to adapt vaccination strategies for the unique challenges posed by the winter season.

The event aimed to address the increased incidence of flu and cold cases during winter, with a focus on at-risk populations and to enhance pharmacy-based vaccination services for seasonal preparedness through discussions on proactive measures and strategies to meet the challenges of winter.

The event was moderated by Dr Luna Bizri, founder and manager of community pharmacy, clinical assistant professor, and adjunct faculty member at Lunapharm Pharmacy, Lebanese International University, and Lebanese American University, Lebanon. The panellists were: Prof. Lisa Nissen, director of health workforce optimisation at the Centre for the Business and Economics of Health, University of Queensland, Australia; Eric J. Yager, chair of the Department of Allied Health Sciences at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, USA; Ilan J. Kreiser, pharmacist, and international liaison officer at the Pharmaceutical Association of Israel, Israel; Anna van Renen, research and policy officer at International Longevity Centre, UK. Below is a summary of the event outcomes; and Leticia Caligaris, pharmacist, Ministry of Defence, Uruguay.

Mr Yager discussed the immunological and virological considerations in the flu and cold season, with a focus on the ageing population and the immune system. He highlighted the changes that occur in the immune system, antibodies and T cells, and their importance in protecting against viruses such as flu, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). He explained that the immune response against these viruses changes with age, with the immune system reaching maximal ability to respond to threats and vaccines in adulthood but declining in vaccine response in older age. He mentioned that certain groups are at a higher risk of severe outcomes during COVID-19 infection, such as individuals with hypertension, immunocompromised conditions, and diabetes mellitus. These comorbidities are associated with a higher proportion of hospitalisations. So, it is important to prioritise vaccination not only for COVID-19 but also for other viral infections to reduce the risk of severe outcomes among these high-risk individuals. Mr Yager also discussed vaccine efficacy against hospitalisation, highlighting the importance of staying up to date with vaccines throughout the fall-winter season to protect against RSV, which causes problems in winter and has a large impact on public health. He also highlighted the difference between active and passive immunisation. Active immunity results from the immune system’s response to a virus or vaccine, providing lasting protection, whereas passive immunisation involves receiving antibodies from another individual for temporary defence. Mr Yager concluded by emphasising the need to consider the age of individuals when vaccinating them against winter diseases and the availability of newer tools to protect against flu and colds.

Prof. Nissen emphasised the importance of vaccination in primary care, particularly for older adults, and the increasing role of pharmacists in administering vaccines in Australia. She discussed the Australian vaccination journey, which began about 10 years ago, with the expansion of vaccination services in community pharmacies. Australia now provides millions of influenza vaccines and other vaccines through community pharmacies, making it one of the leading providers of winter vaccination. COVID-19 vaccines were administered rapidly in Australia in 2021–2022, primarily through community pharmacies. Influenza vaccinations in pharmacies increased by almost 25% between 2020 and 2023, with over two million flu vaccines delivered in 2023 through community pharmacies. Prof. Nissen also emphasised that starting next year, pharmacists will receive government payment for offering vaccination services. This development is positive for pharmacies involved in administering vaccinations. She addressed the current issue of vaccine fatigue in multiple regions. Discussions and seminars focused on hesitancy and engagement in vaccinations are under way to strengthen community confidence in immunisation. This concern is also being actively addressed in Australia. She also shared some lessons learned and successful strategies that could help prepare for winter. These include involving community pharmacies and ensuring that flu services are available through them. In addition, to ensure effective vaccination efforts, it is essential to prepare the workforce for increased demand in community pharmacies. The goal is to have flu vaccination services available at any pharmacy people visit. This includes ensuring that all staff, including assistant technicians, are on board with the vaccination programme implementation. To enhance awareness, booking

systems such as patient or customer applications can be used to remind individuals to return to their pharmacist for flu vaccines. The application can also allow online booking for vaccinations, with a focus on high-risk and regular patients.

Mr Krieser discussed the status of vaccination in Israel. The influenza immunisation season runs from September to December, with pharmacists authorised to perform influenza immunisation since 2017. The Ministry of Health recommends influenza vaccination for the entire population over the age of six months. He highlighted specific requirements for the flu season including an immunisation room, flu shot pre-ordering, and storage space. Given that pharmacists undergo training to administer vaccines, they can effectively be involved in addressing immunisation needs of at-risk individuals.

Miss Van Renen highlighted the severity of influenza and pneumococcal disease, which cause millions of severe cases and deaths annually. The NHS offers free pneumococcal, COVID-19, and flu vaccines to people over 65 years old and immunocompromised individuals, as well as healthcare workers, carers and those living with someone who is severely immunocompromised. In 2022, 79.9% of people over 65 received the flu vaccine and 71.5% received the pneumococcal vaccine. Vaccines are widely available in various locations, including pharmacies, and vaccine information can be found online. The UK has implemented several measures to enhance vaccination coverage, including the expansion of free vaccination services in pharmacies and extended funding from the NHS for pharmacy-based vaccination. Miss Van Renen emphasised the need for more inclusive and representative campaigns, increased community collaborations and easier vaccine booking systems to streamline the vaccination process. She highlighted the importance of improved digital health record systems, reminders from pharmacies and enhanced privacy protection in these facilities.

Ms Caligaris presented various strategies to enhance vaccination efforts in different countries. In Uruguay, a plan has been presented to the Ministry of Health to start flu immunisation in community pharmacies with the help of nurses. In the USA, a new flu vaccine campaign has been implemented to target different populations, such as pregnant women and older people. In South Africa, flyers have been used to educate the public about the difference between colds and flu, and, in Spain, a strategy involving photos of patients getting vaccinated has been employed to encourage vaccinations. Ms Caligaris also emphasised the use of artificial intelligence to send personalised reminders and information about upcoming vaccination campaigns. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of segmenting the audience and recording patient medical records after receiving flu vaccinations. Finally, she noted the significance of blockchain technology in ensuring transparent and secure distribution of vaccines.

The insights shared by the panellists underline the critical role of pharmacists in immunising against influenza, COVID-19 and pneumococcal disease, and the need for continuous training and knowledge refreshment. The event provided an overview of the current vaccination situation and offered valuable recommendations to optimise vaccination efforts for the upcoming winter season.

7 Conclusion

In navigating the diverse approaches to pharmacy-based immunisation preparations for winter across different hemispheres and regions, a common thread emerges — pharmacists are ready to support healthcare systems in increasing vaccination rates, especially in winter periods.

The timing of flu vaccination campaigns varies globally, aligning with the specific climatic conditions and health priorities of each region. Logistical preparations are a cornerstone of successful immunisation programmes, as highlighted by the experiences from England, the US, New Zealand and Lebanon. Whether expanding the workforce, leveraging pharmacy students or exploring mobile vaccination units, the emphasis is on reaching diverse populations and ensuring a smooth delivery of vaccines.

The success stories from Nigeria, England, Spain and Lebanon underscore the effectiveness of tailored promotional strategies. Free or affordable vaccine options, social media campaigns, and community outreach efforts demonstrate the versatility and adaptability of pharmacy-based promotions.

Education remains a powerful tool, with pharmacy students, faculty members and practitioners actively engaging in community outreach, health fairs and educational events. The focus on adult vaccination, cultural competence and continuous communication reinforces the commitment to holistic healthcare.

As we reflect on these diverse experiences, it becomes clear that the journey towards winter wellness through pharmacy-based immunisation is dynamic and evolving. The collective efforts of pharmacists, healthcare professionals, policymakers and communities contribute to building resilient healthcare systems that prioritise prevention and protection.

Looking ahead, it is imperative to continue fostering collaboration, sharing best practices and adapting strategies to meet the unique needs of each community. Winter may bring its challenges, but with pharmacies at the forefront of immunisation efforts, we can face the season with resilience, knowledge and a shared commitment to the health and well-being of all.

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