

**Question for written answer E-013779/2013
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR)

Subject: Burden of childhood influenza: a critical situation

Seasonal influenza is a serious disease and a major cause of morbidity and mortality, with significant direct and indirect costs for healthcare systems. Children have been recognised as the main transmitters of influenza in the community. By vaccinating children against influenza, we may be able directly to protect children, and indirectly to protect society, by achieving herd immunity (i.e. immunity that occurs when the vaccination of a significant portion of a population provides a measure of protection for individuals who are not vaccinated, as the likelihood of coming into contact with a carrier is greatly reduced). The vaccination of children will ultimately reduce the overall influenza burden on healthcare systems.

In the last year there has been greater recognition of the burden of paediatric influenza, and the rationale for including children as a focus for annual vaccination has increased. Children have been recognised as a risk group for seasonal influenza by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its 'Vaccines against Influenza' position paper. In addition, the burden of disease faced by healthy children has been recognised by the scientific report of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on seasonal influenza vaccination of children and pregnant women. In 2006, Parliament adopted a resolution that recognised the need to immunise against seasonal influenza as a means of preparing against a pandemic outbreak, by building the necessary vaccination infrastructure in case of an emergency. Lastly, the UK has adopted an innovative vaccination policy and is currently engaged in the gradual rollout of a seasonal influenza vaccination programme for children.

However, Council Recommendation 2009/1019/EU of 22 December 2009 on seasonal influenza vaccination makes no reference to children as a risk group. The recommendation is centred on achieving vaccination coverage rates among risk groups (defined as the elderly and people with specific health conditions) and healthcare workers. Updating the recommendation to include children as a risk group would make it possible further to protect both children and the overall population in a cost-effective manner.

In light of this, would the Commission consider updating the recommendation to reflect the WHO's position and the increasing recognition by the ECDC and the Member States of the burden of paediatric influenza?