

Current major event

The new SAGE recommendations on seasonal influenza vaccination, 2021

Given the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) continues to recommend annual seasonal influenza vaccination and prioritization of health workers and older adults as target groups. SAGE considers that the co-administration of an inactivated seasonal influenza vaccine and any dose of a COVID-19 vaccine is acceptable.

Editorial note

Influenza causes respiratory illnesses that range in severity from mild to severe with complications requiring hospitalization and might lead to death, particularly among high-risk groups.

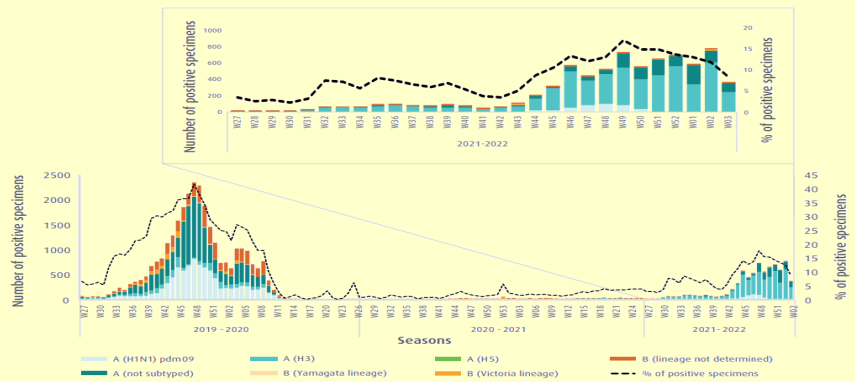
In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, seasonal influenza epidemics occur mainly during winter (October–February). These epidemics put a heavy burden on the health systems of many countries in the Region, especially those with low resources or who are experiencing humanitarian emergency.

To reduce excess morbidity and mortality caused by seasonal influenza, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean supports Member States in introducing and expanding seasonal influenza vaccination policies and programmes targeting the recommended SAGE groups.

Out of the 22 Member States, 15 countries/territories (68% of total Member States) reported having a national seasonal influenza vaccination policy (see table) as well as influenza vaccination recommendations for health workers and older adults (above 65 years). A total of 14 Member States (93%) have vaccination recommendations for people with chronic medical conditions, while 12 Member States (80%) have recommendations for pregnant women and young children. Three countries with no national influenza vaccination policy reported having vaccination recommendations targeting certain risk groups such as older adults, people with chronic medical conditions and hajj travellers.

Despite these developments, uptake of influenza vaccines in the Region remains

Positive specimens by subtype/lineage and percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza viruses starting from week 27, 2019 till week 3, 2022



Seasonal influenza vaccine policy and programmes in the Region, 2021

Policy status	Countries
Policy in place	Bahrain, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.
No policy	Afghanistan, Djibouti, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

low and the documentation of vaccination coverage is sub-optimal. Member States are facing many challenges when trying to increase uptake of influenza vaccines including competing priorities, lack of national evidence and vaccine hesitancy.

Therefore, the Regional Office has drafted a five-years regional roadmap (2022–2026) to increase the uptake and utilization of seasonal influenza vaccines with three objectives:

1. To develop and implement evidence-based influenza vaccination policies.
2. To strengthen vaccine delivery programmes through integration with existing EPI programme.
3. To drive vaccine access and uptake.

Guided by this roadmap, the Regional Office will support Member States in generating the needed evidence, strengthening partnership and coordination, and addressing the causes of influenza vaccine hesitancy.

In light of the new SAGE recommendations, the Regional Office has developed and adapted information, education and communication (IEC) materials to assist Member States in promoting the use of seasonal influenza vaccines during the current season.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

COVID-19 in 22 EMR countries

Current public health events of concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): 2019-2022

Afghanistan	[159 682 (7 393), 4.6%]
Bahrain	[327 466 (1 399), 0.4%]
Djibouti	[15 271 (189), 1.2%]
Egypt	[408 495 (22 330), 5.5%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[6 250 490 (132 230), 2.1%]
Iraq	[2 154 237 (24 287), 1.1%]
Jordan	[1 141 048 (13 073), 1.1%]
Kuwait	[497 454 (2486), 0.5%]
Lebanon	[858 848 (9474), 1.1%]
Libya	[405 425 (5049), 1.0%]
Morocco	[1 093 978 (15 113), 1.4%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[482 979 (5049), 1.0%]
Oman	[322 438 (4128), 1.3%]
Pakistan	[1 367 605 (29 097), 2.1%]
Qatar	[323 345 (634), 0.2%]
Saudi Arabia	[652 354 (8920), 1.4%]
Somalia	[24 322 (1335), 5.5%]
Sudan	[55 149 (2965), 6.2%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[50 943 (2965), 5.8%]
Tunisia	[846 761 (25 954), 3.1%]
United Arab Emirates	[825 699 (2214), 0.3%]
Yemen	[10 585 (1995), 18.8%]