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## Eurosurveillance, Volume 12, Issue 3, 18 January 2007

### Articles

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### VENICE: Europe's new network for vaccination

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Vaccination is an extremely effective tool in reducing the burden of infectious diseases. Many vaccine products currently available in Europe. Vaccines developed and introduced according to common European Union (EU)-wide regulatory requirements, which implies that they are licensed for common indications and populations. Nevertheless, European countries often use different schedules, concurrent vaccines, measure vaccine coverage in different ways or in different age groups, and have different systems for monitoring adverse events following immunisation.

The public health assessment of newly licensed vaccines is carried out independently in each country in Europe. Although immunisation programmes are implemented at the national level, these have an impact beyond borders, especially in a common market and therefore infections within the EU. The enlargement of the EU from 12 to 15 states in 2004 and to 27 in 2007 is also likely to have increased the variability of vaccine policies.

So far, there have been several projects addressing vaccination from different perspectives, providing opportunities to exchange immunisation programme experiences in Europe. Most activity has been restricted to projects addressing specific infectious diseases, such as meningococcal disease.

### **Aims and objectives of the VENICE project**

The Vaccine European New Integrated Collaboration Effort (VENICE, <http://www.venice.cineca.org/>) project was launched in January 2006 with the aim of establishing a European network with experience of working with national immunisation programmes to monitor the success of immunisation programmes in Europe. The network, which would enable detection of any possible differences in safety or efficacy from the different uses of vaccines across the EU. In other words, careful monitoring of vaccine schedules will enable experts to see which schedule could be the best for a vaccine, whether the efficacy of vaccine is affected by co-administration of other vaccines, and what the most common adverse events following immunisation are. In addition, using the VENICE network, it will be possible to monitor the impact of new papilloma virus vaccines and rotavirus vaccines in European countries and to monitor pandemic vaccines in the future.

Other specific aims and objectives of VENICE are:

- to improve knowledge about immunisation programmes in the EU,
- to identify and recommend the best indicators for monitoring immunisation programmes,
- to define models of the decision-making process when introducing new vaccines into national immunisation programmes,
- to develop best practice models for dealing with adverse events following immunisation.

### **Current work**

VENICE is also currently collecting information about national policies concerning the use of new rotavirus and human papillomavirus vaccines. The questionnaire survey in all European countries and the survey will be launched on the web later this month.

One of the most important sub-projects within VENICE has been the development of a website (<http://www.venice.cineca.org/>), which provides information and recommends standard approaches (common case definitions, methods for evaluating European immunisation programmes) to vaccination surveillance in participating countries. In the future, the website will also provide regular updates on national and regional immunisation programmes, including schedules, coverage, methods for calculating coverage, systems for adverse event management. The site will also publish updates on scientific evidence concerning the safety and efficacy of new vaccines against rotavirus, human papillomavirus, pneumococcus, and varicella/VZV. It will provide access to information about vaccine policy and European regulatory bodies such as the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicines, and to relevant information on vaccination from international organisations such as the World Health Organization and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

To assist with improving general knowledge about vaccination programmes, experts were asked to write a short report describing the immunisation programmes in their countries. These reports are being published in the ECDC's Vaccines & Immunisation newsletter ([http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/Health\\_topics/VI/VI\\_newsletter.html](http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/Health_topics/VI/VI_newsletter.html)). An overview of this survey will be published on the VENICE website in 2007. A brief summary will be accessible and the complete set of information collected will be available to all gatekeepers.

VENICE is supported by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO). The project has funding for 3 years, and at the end of the activity will be taken over by the ECDC in its capacity as the lead for the infectious disease work. There are 28 European countries participating in the project (all except Malta) and two EEA/EFTA countries (Iceland and Norway). In each country, several people in public health institutions have been identified as gatekeepers responsible for the project at national level and three contact persons have been identified at the ECDC level.

Beside its links with the ECDC, VENICE is collaborating with other organisations on vaccine-preventable diseases and immunisation issues. It is also funded projects like EUVAC.NET (<http://www.euvac.net>), VACSATC (Vaccine Adverse Case Surveillance and Training and Communication) and the Bridge project.

(<http://www.brightoncollaboration.org>), in order to be complementary activities and to facilitate dissemination of relevant data to the vaccination

The first VENICE workshop was held in Malta in April 2006, together with a second workshop; the next one will be organised in spring 2007 and will also include presenting the results of the DG Research-funded project POLYMOD (support Policy-Making), which will be posted on the VENICE website.

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