



Fighting the resurgence of measles with reminder messages

In 2024, the resurgence of measles' cases peaked in Europe with 127,000 cases, undermining herd immunity and putting both children and adults at risk. In Catalonia, a pilot aimed to increase the mumps, measles and rubella (MMR) vaccination coverage of children to reach the 95% target set by the WHO (World Health Organization). The initiative responded to barriers such as the lack of large-scale outreach method, or insufficient knowledge on MMR vaccination importance and vaccination schedule among the general population.

Different SMS messages were sent to a total of 14 358 families of children who had not received the recommended two doses of the MMR vaccine. Thanks to the intervention, complete vaccination coverage of 4-year-old children increased by 1.86% between May and June 2024. The pilot, supported through the 'Overcoming Obstacles to Vaccination' project, funded by the European Union, was rolled out in phases, starting with the development of two different reminder messages to test which one solicited more responses, followed by the sending of these messages, and evaluation of their impacts over the vaccination rate. It was observed that on the short run the most assertive message prompted earlier vaccine administration, but that on the long run both messages led to similar results.

Mutual learning and collaboration as a key driver

Collaboration between the Catalan health authority and local healthcare providers, as well as data engineers and statisticians, was essential to ensure the effective delivery of the SMS reminders. Support from the existing IT infrastructure notably played a crucial role in the success of the pilot.

The mutual learning activities provided an invaluable space for the health authority to exchange best practices with other European countries, notably Denmark, and gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of different reminder schemes in other countries. A key factor for the design and implementation of the pilot was the existing cooperation framework among stakeholders in Catalonia, as well as the involvement and dedication of the representative from the health authority who led the project. In addition, the pilot contributed to the improvement of the vaccination registry database, which will lead to better monitoring and more targeted vaccination campaigns.

The pilot has a strong potential for replication in other regions facing similar challenges. Given its success, the approach could be scaled up by other health authorities, building on lessons learnt in Catalonia, as well as Croatia, Lithuania, Murcia and Slovenia where the pilot has also been piloted. The pre-existing IT infrastructure used for the Catalonian pilot can be applied to other interventions. In other regions, stakeholders recommended the use of online health applications to limit the costs and avoid saturating the general population with SMS messages.

Overcoming Obstacles to Vaccination across the EU



"Overcoming Obstacles to Vaccination" is a three-year EU-funded project that aims to boost vaccination coverage by tackling physical, practical, and administrative barriers to seven key vaccines, including COVID-19, HPV (Human Papillomavirus), and MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella). The project identified effective practices across EU Member States, piloted them in countries facing similar challenges, and developed tailored recommendations for policymakers, health authorities, professionals, and citizens.