Overcoming Obstacles to Vaccination

Funded by the European Union

Working with vocational schools to increase MMR vaccine uptake

Limited opening hours of vaccination services, financial barriers - including taking time off work or school - and lack of reliable and accessible information make it difficult for young people to get vaccinated. In Upper Austria, healthcare professionals brought vaccination services directly to students in six vocational schools, making it easier and more convenient for them to get vaccinated; they aimed to tackle low vaccination coverage against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) and pertussis (DTaP/IPV) vaccines among young people.

The barriers addressed by this initiative are particularly prominent among students in vocational schools. They become independent at a younger age, as their professional education places them directly into the working world. This independence leads them to make their own vaccination decisions earlier than their peers. Additionally, after the age of 15, routine vaccinations are no longer administered during school medical visits, creating a gap in access. Young people are also more exposed to misinformation and lack reliable scientific information about vaccination.

Through the 'Boost to Go' campaign, students over 14 years of age received reliable and engaging information via brochures, pocket cards and videos, helping them make informed decisions about vaccinations and their health more broadly. The mobile vaccination team delivered interactive talks in classrooms to around 1 400 students, using videos and visuals to explain the importance of vaccinations. After the interactive talk, 34% of students (473) chose to attend a one-to-one consultation to review their vaccination history and receive tailored advice. Following these sessions, on-site vaccinations were offered to students who were missing or due for vaccines. As a result, 174 students chose to get vaccinated, demonstrating the impact of convenience and the removal of practical barriers such as booking appointments, taking time off work, since vocational students alternate between school and professional work, or covering costs.

This pilot initiative, funded by the Europe Union through the 'Overcoming Obstacles to Vaccination' project, was rolled out in phases. First, Upper Austria's health authorities secured the support of the heads of vocational schools and designed the intervention. Then, from December 2024 to February 2025, 'vaccination info days' were held at six vocational schools.

Working with peers and new partners to reach out to young people

Vocational schools had not previously participated in health initiatives, so this project gave Upper Austria's health authority an opportunity to forge new connections. Close collaboration with school heads was essential: they distributed invitations and informational materials prepared by the project team for both students and parents, and helped organise the information days.

The mobile vaccination team included a peer with a similar background and close in age to the students. This peer facilitated direct, face-to-face communication, making the topic of vaccination more relatable and encouraging open dialogue.

The initiative gave the Austrian Health Ministry and Upper Austrian health authority opportunities for capacity building and mutual learning through on-site visits, study trips and online exchanges with peers. It introduced evidence-based practices not commonly used in Austrian public health campaigns, including designing initiatives with built-in evaluation to assess impact. It also helped develop a deeper understanding of how to communicate with hard-to-reach groups and which messages to prioritise to build trust, providing insights that will be valuable for future vaccination campaigns.

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.