

What do teens in Europe think about vaccines?



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The importance of vaccination throughout life is a key message at the heart of this year's World Immunisation Week and the #VaccinesWork campaign. As an organisation whose main focus is meningitis and septicaemia, we know only too well the consequences of a common misconception that vaccinations are just for babies.

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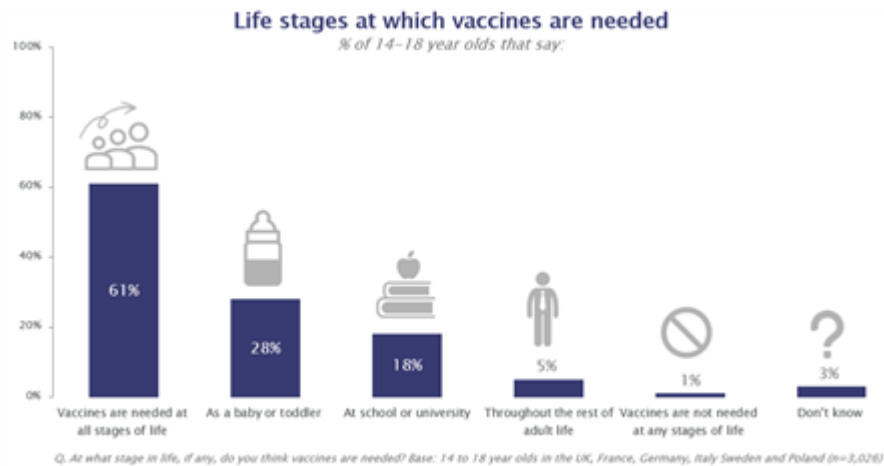
We are first to agree that infant vaccination is one of the most important and highly successful areas of protection but other ages are also at risk.

Teenagers are an essential piece of the puzzle when it comes to raising awareness of the importance of vaccines. This is not only because they are the adults, and parents, of tomorrow but also because it is at this point that many who have been in the education system will move into the world of work, meaning they are harder to reach to talk about recommended vaccines.

We conducted a survey through [ComRes](#) of 3,026 14-18 year olds across the UK, France, Germany, Poland, Italy and Sweden to gain a better understanding of their levels of awareness around vaccines and how best to communicate these essential messages to them.

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We were pleased to find that there was a very positive attitude to receiving information about vaccines, with only 9% saying that they did not want to receive information. There was also a positive response to the need for vaccines throughout life. Young people in France and Germany were the most well-informed on this topic, with around three quarters indicating that vaccines are needed at all stages of life (74% and 73% respectively). In the other countries surveyed awareness was lower, in Poland and the UK in particular, there was a greater belief that vaccines are needed as a baby or toddler (41% in both the UK and Poland) or at school or university (33% in the UK, 23% in Poland) - not at other stages of life. This may indicate a need for greater education in these areas and it would be interesting to compare these findings with the figures for vaccine uptake over the course of life to examine whether a greater awareness of need for vaccines results in a greater level of uptake.



Interestingly, this awareness does not seem to correlate with the general attitude towards the safety of vaccines. One in five (18%) of those surveyed say they are afraid of having a vaccination because they don't trust them, and a worrying 32% responded that they think vaccines can be dangerous. In France especially this concern over the safety of vaccines was most prevalent, with 41% of adolescents agreeing that they can be dangerous and 20% saying that they are afraid of vaccines because they don't trust them. A [study published in EBioMedicine](#) last year found that the same proportion of the general population in France disagreed with the statement that vaccines are safe, so it may be that adolescent opinion is representative of the general population on the subject of vaccination.

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In France 61% of adolescents report seeing or hearing about vaccines through their doctors. A [study published in Eurosurveillance](#) in November of last year found that 14% of French GPs are moderately vaccine-hesitant. It is possible that this hesitancy reported in adolescents stems from the attitudes of their GPs towards vaccination, a concerning thought.

Vaccines can be dangerous (% net agree)

KEY:

UK
France (FR)
Germany (DE)
Italy (IT)
Poland (PL)
Sweden (SW)



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Base: 14 to 18 year olds in the UK, France, Germany, Italy Sweden and Poland (n=3,026)

In the other countries surveyed, adolescents reported learning about vaccination predominantly through their parents or guardians, with doctors coming in second place and school or teachers following behind. A finding of note is that there were marked differences between the individual countries and where they report hearing about vaccines and importantly, where they would like to hear about vaccines in future, indicating that an approach to awareness raising on the safety of vaccines and the importance of vaccines across the life course must be tailored to the needs of adolescents on a more country-specific basis. We were also surprised to learn that young people express less of an interest in learning about vaccination via digital media. This source was considered less trustworthy and traditional means were clearly favoured.

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Overall the results are promising. Attitudes towards vaccination and its necessity throughout life are generally good and methods of communication have clearly been identified. There is certainly more work to be done, particularly with regard to addressing vaccine hesitancy as an important part of education about the role vaccines have to play throughout life. The information from this survey will provide us with an important steer towards the best methods to use to communicate with young people and to move further towards a universal understanding of the need for vaccines at all stages of life.



Sam is Executive Director at CoMO. She has a background in scientific communications and healthcare charities and has been part of CoMO since 2015. Sam has been involved in the Life Course Immunisation initiative since 2015.