

BACKGROUNDER: Boosting Knowledge Toward Action on Adult Pertussis Vaccination

Pertussis, more commonly known as whooping cough is a highly infectious, vaccine-preventable respiratory disease which has seen a serious rise in prevalence among older adult populations during the past three decades. Pertussis among adults, especially those who are aged 65 years and over or with comorbidities and pathological conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is of particular concern. Recent evidence shows that pertussis-associated deaths occur frequently in older populations. In fact, the highest mortality for pertussis is typically among those over 74 years of age.

Despite the high mortality rates among the older population, many countries do not routinely recommend pertussis vaccination for older adults, with the exception of new parents, adults working with children, or health care workers. Recent evidence however suggests that adult pertussis vaccination should be considered within national immunization programs to help control repeated outbreaks and associated disease burden within the ageing populations. Lack of recognition and under-reporting of pertussis cases can act as a major barrier to increasing the awareness of the disease burden within ageing populations and towards improving uptake rates of pertussis vaccination. Greater awareness of the benefit of vaccinations through targeted public health messages is needed among older people and health care professionals.

In April 2022, the International Federation on Ageing conducted research to gather data on the regulatory processes, the pathway for vaccine recommendations and the funding of adult pertussis vaccines across five countries (Brazil, India, Spain, Vietnam, and Mexico) with the aim of identifying the status of adult pertussis vaccination within associated national vaccine programs. The study also included semi-structured interviews with representatives from professional and patient associations and ageing organizations to help gather additional intelligence from those who collectively could help to influence programs and policies. The interviews included questions on the status of adult pertussis vaccination in the country of interest, barriers to introducing vaccines, and recommendations for informing future policy.

Study findings illustrated that while each country faces unique challenges, there are overarching similarities that can be leveraged to help address and inform the inclusion of adult pertussis vaccination within national programs. Across study countries, there were few examples of inclusion of adults in recommendations for pertussis. For some countries, recommendations were made for pregnant women and health care workers (Brazil and Spain), while in others, adults were excluded entirely from recommendations (India and Vietnam).

The study findings also highlighted key barriers to increasing uptake rates of pertussis vaccinations among older adults including geographic barriers (living in rural and remote areas), access to healthcare providers, as well as a general lack of awareness regarding the benefits and availability of the vaccine to the public.

Read the full [report](#) of the study here.

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The [International Federation on Ageing](#) (IFA) is an international, non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academics, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Nearly 50 years old, the IFA has become known as a leading and innovative organization that works across disciplines and sectors toward common goals that improve the lives of older people. Through the IFA's formal relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) and general consultative status at the United Nations and its agencies, the IFA is in the position to advocate directly with member states and contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue.