

COVID-19 and Respiratory Virus Vaccination Strategies for Family Physicians

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Influenza, pneumococcal, and COVID-19 vaccinations have been made easily accessible in Singapore to reduce the incidence of respiratory infections caused by these pathogens. COVID-19 vaccination is free under the National Vaccination Programme for all eligible residents, while influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations are fully subsidised for HealthierSG-enrolled Singaporeans who are 65 years and above or who have certain medical conditions.

These efforts to increase the uptake of influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations have been successful. The uptake of pneumococcal vaccination among residents aged 65 and above increased from 22 percent in 2020 to 61 percent in 2024, while the uptake for influenza vaccination in the same age group also increased from 18 percent to 42 percent over the same period.¹

By 2024, 88.7 percent of Singaporean residents have also received the full regimen of Covid-19 vaccinations.² However, a study done in Singapore found that there were relatively high rates of hesitancy for the booster dose among those already vaccinated. Over 30 percent of study participants reported being booster-hesitant, with 4.7 percent reporting that they would refuse the booster vaccine, despite completing the primary COVID-19 vaccine series.³

Vaccine hesitancy is complex. The reasons for vaccine hesitancy are varied and multifactorial. These factors include cultural norms, historical context, socioeconomic limitations, and personal experience. Targeted interventions that acknowledge and respond to diverse concerns about efficacy and safety and distrust of institutions and government are necessary to address vaccine hesitancy.⁴

Healthcare providers play an integral role in tackling barriers to vaccine acceptance; and vaccine advocacy. Research has shown that there is a strong link between trust in the physician and vaccination rates.⁵ Notably, primary care providers have been found to play an influential role in vaccination efforts⁶ as most patients view their primary care providers as trusted messengers.⁷

This issue will provide an update for family physicians on effective vaccination strategies for COVID-19 and respiratory viruses.

In Unit 1, Dr Ian Wee offers a compelling case for primary care physicians to remain vigilant and familiar with vaccine preventable respiratory diseases.

In Unit 2, Dr Leong Hoe Nam provides a comprehensive overview on the safety, efficacy, and future applications of mRNA vaccines. He also provides evidence to address misconceptions regarding mRNA vaccines.

In Unit 3, Drs Kenneth Tan and Gabriel Yee provide evidence for the use and integration of evidence-based communication strategies in vaccination counselling.

In this issue, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan has selected 10 current readings on topics related to Covid-19 and respiratory virus vaccination strategies. These readings include articles on burden of disease and the importance of vaccination.

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