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[Home](#) > Vaksinko: an informational campaign about vaccines in Bulgaria

Country

Bulgaria

Target

Citizens

Government and Public Health

Topic

Local Activities

Media

Stakeholders

Vaccination

Tags

Vaccines

science-in-society

Background

Bulgaria has a long immunization experience. Immunizations against tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella, and hepatitis B have been mandatory for decades as well as recently introduced immunizations against pneumococcal diseases and Haemophilus infl. *b* infections too. Additionally, HPV vaccine was intensively introduced as recommended for 12-year old girls within a national vaccination campaign for prevention of HPV - caused cancers.

Unfortunately, after 2007 anti-vaccination movements have started emerging, and we saw one of the largest Bulgarian epidemics of measles arise in 2010.

The media, mainly through Internet and some television broadcasts, spreads messages against vaccination, vaccines or the mandatory status of vaccinations in the country, and periodically shake the population's trust in vaccines and their benefits. This motivated part of the civil society and public health specialists to discuss the idea of developing a platform where, accessible, reliable and comprehensive information about vaccines and prevention could be found. On this platform, parents would be able to ask questions about vaccines and access information regarding risks associated with skipping mandatory vaccination.

Project description

The project started as a civil action of Non-government organizations (NGOs) such as National Patient Organization, Bulgarian Red Cross and unions of health care workers such as Bulgarian Paediatric Association and National Association of General Practitioners in Bulgaria. It was implemented under the patronage of the Ministry of Health and its main aim was to raise awareness about infectious diseases and vaccination.

This initiative attempts to address society's need to have access to reliable and comprehensive information about vaccines and prevention.

Participants included on one hand, members of the society (mainly parents, but also people who have questions about immunization) and on the other hand, experts in immunization, general practitioners and other public health experts.

The project presents in a positive light the Bulgarian immunization schedule/calendar

and gives information about prevention and prophylaxis of vaccine preventable diseases (VPD), about the process of vaccine production and vaccine safety, about the benefits of recommended immunizations, but also more recent news about vaccines.

This initiative was also the opportunity to organize meetings of healthcare professionals and other events with participation of members of civil society and to discuss hot topics related to vaccines, vaccine preventable diseases, and the role of vaccination in the prevention of VPDs.

This project was elaborated as a national information campaign for vaccines and immunizations. Obviously, one of the effective tools was the development of a web-based platform, a website containing vaccination-related news but also the possibility for interactive communication between parents and citizens and health care workers, about vaccines, mandatory and recommended vaccinations, possible adverse events after immunizations and ways to communicate, report and fix them. On this website, questions from parents/citizens are answered directly by healthcare workers.

This website is organised in nine headings and one of the most important is the section on frequently asked questions (FAQ).

Lessons learned and challenges

Evaluation of the project is a permanent process. On the 28th of February 2017, when the project celebrated its first anniversary, an evaluation report was written and its conclusion was that "the goal was successfully reached". During this first year, the project website was visited by approximately 14,000 visitors aged 25 to 34. Moreover, the Facebook page VAKSINKO has currently more than 11,000 followers.

Now, the main challenge is to continue educating society about vaccination and its benefits. Some of the main tasks to achieve is ensuring of truthful and timely information about VPD and vaccines and earning the trust of young parents in the preventive role of vaccines.

Status of the project

The project is still ongoing. At the moment, the project is oriented mainly to propose and support actual information about vaccine preventable diseases and vaccinations as well as to answer questions about vaccines and immunizations, which can be asked via Facebook and the website of the project.

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