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Vaccinations in pharmacies in France, Ireland and Switzerland: potential for Germany?

This article examines the administration of vaccinations in pharmacies in Germany and compares the experiences with developments in France, Ireland and Switzerland.[1] In Germany, pharmacists are permitted to administer flu vaccinations to persons aged 18 and over or coronavirus vaccinations to persons aged 12 and over on the basis of Section 20c of the Infection Protection Act (IfSG). The nationwide requirements are regulated by the agreement on the administration and billing of protective vaccinations by pharmacies between the GKV-Spitzenverband (National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Funds) and the German Pharmacists' Association (DAV) on the basis of Section 132e (1a) of the Social Security Code V (SGB V). During the last legislative period, there were already plans to allow pharmacists to permanently administer all protective vaccinations with inactivated vaccines to adults. This would have enabled vaccinations against diphtheria, hepatitis B, polio, whooping cough and tetanus, among others. However, the adoption of the corresponding draft law was delayed several times, eventually lapsed due to discontinuity and is currently the subject of legislation with the Pharmacy Supply Development Act (ApoVWG).

Pharmacists who administer vaccinations must have successfully completed medical training and be members of staff at the public pharmacy where they administer the vaccinations. The vaccinations must comply with the general legal provisions in Section 132e of the German Social Code, Book V (SGB V), Section 20c of the Infection Protection Act (IfSG) and Section 2 (3a) and Section 35a of the Pharmacy Operating Regulations (ApBetrO). The guideline "Carrying out protective vaccinations in public pharmacies" issued by the Federal Chamber of Pharmacists regulates the procedure in more detail (Federal Chamber of Pharmacists 2025).

Protective vaccinations in pharmacies that are billed to the statutory health insurance (GKV) must be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Protective Vaccination Guideline (SI-RL). Health insurance funds can also conclude supplementary agreements to enable their insured persons to receive vaccinations beyond the requirements of the SI-RL, for example, by extending the group of people eligible for flu vaccinations to include people between the ages of 18 and 59 without indication.

Even though vaccinations have been permitted in pharmacies in Germany since 2022, the proportion of vaccinations administered in pharmacies in this country is low, although patients are satisfied with vaccinations in pharmacies, as a large-scale study shows (Werthner 2025).

Summary

Vaccinations in pharmacies have long been established in many countries. In Germany, flu vaccinations have been permitted in pharmacies since 2022. In 2023, the flu vaccination rate in Germany among the risk group of people over 65 was 40.4%, which was below the EU-27 average (47.1%) and the vaccination rate achieved in Ireland (75.7%). This article compares vaccinations and the expansion of vaccination authorisations in pharmacies in France, Ireland and Switzerland with the situation in Germany. Even if granting vaccination authorisations to pharmacists does not automatically lead to an increase in vaccination rates, the data from Ireland shows that it is a prerequisite for such an increase. This is because a significant proportion of the younger and working population in particular is vaccinated in pharmacies, while groups of people with a higher number of doctor visits due to their age are mainly vaccinated by general practitioners. In all the countries studied, positive experiences have been made with flu vaccinations and the extension of vaccination authorisation to other vaccines in pharmacies, and this is also to be expected in Germany.

Keywords

Vaccinations, vaccination eligibility, pharmacies, vaccination rates, international comparison

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The ABDA reports only 121,600 flu vaccinations in public pharmacies for the 2024/2025 vaccination season. This is an increase compared to the previous season, but at the same time, the number of pharmacies offering vaccinations has decreased from around 1,500 to around 1,400 (ABDA 2025:70).

1. Vaccination rates and vaccination authorisations for pharmacists in international comparison: the example of flu vaccination

When comparing the European countries of Germany, France, Ireland and Switzerland with regard to the role of pharmacies in vaccinations, it makes sense to classify where these countries stand in terms of vaccination rates achieved in a broader European and selected international comparison.

The vaccination rates for influenza vaccination in the risk group of people over 65 are suitable for this purpose due to the good data available from Eurostat and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

There are considerable differences in vaccination rates (Eurostat 2024): since 2021, Denmark (2023: 77.5%) and Ireland (75.71%) have been at the top of the list. France follows far behind with 56.2%. At 40.4%, Germany is below the EU-27 average of 47.09%. In 2022, Switzerland was still below Germany with a vaccination rate of 37.5%.

Overall, the data shows a very wide range of vaccination rates between less than 10% (Poland) and over 75% (Denmark and Ireland). Germany is below the EU-27 average in all years considered. The WHO vaccination coverage recommendation of 75% of people aged 65 and over (World Health Assembly 2003) is only achieved or exceeded in Denmark and Ireland.

In many developed countries, vaccination rates in this population group are above the EU-27 average. The United Kingdom stands at 77.8%, Canada at 73.7%, New Zealand at 61% (all 2024), and the United States also achieved a vaccination rate of 69.8% in 2020 (WHO 2025).

Pharmacists in many countries around the world have been allowed to vaccinate for a long time. In 2021, the ABDA pointed out that pharmacists are authorised to vaccinate against influenza in at least 23 countries, including the USA (ABDA 2021: 88). Pharmacists are now permitted to vaccinate in Germany, France, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, Norway, Great Britain, Ireland, Latvia, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland. A study on Portugal shows a positive impact on the vaccination coverage rate of the population (Teixeira 2024).

In all of the countries mentioned, COVID-19 and flu vaccinations are available in pharmacies, often alongside other vaccinations, such as those against shingles and pneumococcus. In France, Norway and Portugal, pharmacists are permitted to administer almost all available vaccinations. The same applies to some cantons in Switzerland.

2. Selected countries in comparison

2.1 France 2.1.1 Healthcare system and vaccination

In France, there is a central health insurance system called "L'Assurance Maladie", which is compulsory for all citizens residing in France. Outpatient care by general practitioners and specialists is provided almost exclusively by independent doctors in private practice. There is a shortage of doctors in France, especially in rural areas (DREES 2023).

Residents of France can get vaccinated at various facilities: at registered doctors' practices, in pharmacies, at independent nurses' practices, at midwives' practices, at vaccination centres, at PMI (Protection maternelle et infantile) for children up to 6 years of age, at medical laboratories, at international vaccination centres, at occupational health services, at university facilities for preventive medicine and at health centres.

2.1.2 Vaccination authorisations for pharmacists

Pharmacists are not permitted to prescribe and administer vaccines to children under the age of eleven, with the sole exception of the COVID-19 vaccine for children aged five and above. Pharmacists are permitted to prescribe and administer all protective vaccinations to adults and children over the age of eleven, with restrictions only applying to patients with compromised immune systems (Ministère de la Santé 2025).

Vaccination in pharmacies was introduced gradually in France. In 2017, the administration of vaccines by pharmacists was initially approved on a trial basis in some regions for the seasonal flu vaccine. A decree issued in April 2019 then extended flu vaccination by pharmacists to the entire French territory from 1 March 2019 (Décret 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic played an important role in the expansion of these competencies. From March 2021, pharmacists were allowed to administer Covid-19 vaccines outside of vaccination centres. This

expansion was considered very successful. From November 2022, trained pharmacists were allowed to administer 14 additional vaccines (on medical prescription). Since 2023, they have been authorised to prescribe and administer most vaccines in the vaccination calendar for people aged 11 and over without a prior prescription.

2.1.3 Vaccination rates and the role of pharmacists

In terms of vaccination coverage, France is above the EU-27 average (47.09%) with 56.2% (2023) of the population aged 65 and over receiving the flu vaccine. Vaccination rates among risk groups younger than 65 have tended to decline over the period under review, with the exception of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Since 2020/2021, this has fallen by 13.4 percentage points (Santé publique 2025). (Fig. 1.)

The National Agreement for Pharmacists with Their Own Pharmacy (Convention nationale des pharmaciens titulaires d'officine), which came into force in 2022, expanded the role of pharmacists within the French healthcare system (Journal officiel 2022). The agreement gave pharmacists the authority to provide health services that were previously reserved for doctors (L'Assurance Maladie 2025).

Influenza vaccination, vaccination rates in France over time from 2008/2009 to 2024/2025

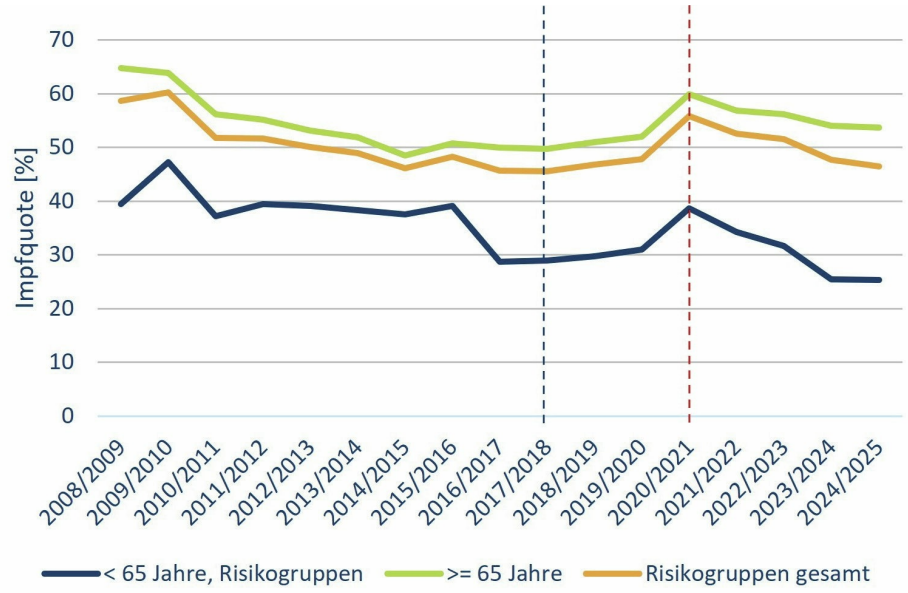


Fig. 1: **Flu vaccination, vaccination rates in France over time from 2008/2009 to 2024/2025, population >= 65 years and younger risk groups. Source: own representation IGES (according to Santé publique 2025). Notes: Start of vaccination in pharmacies (2018/2019) and coronavirus pandemic (2020/2021) are marked by dotted lines.**

2.1.4 Requirements and cost coverage

In order to prescribe and administer vaccines, pharmacists must first complete a training course. The training takes approximately ten hours and can also be completed as an online course.

When administering vaccinations in pharmacies, suitable premises must be available, including a confidential area for preliminary consultations without access to medicines, suitable equipment, a cold room with temperature recording and monitoring for the storage of vaccines, and arrangements for the disposal of infectious waste.

Pharmacists receive a flat fee of €7.50 for flu vaccinations. They also receive €7.50 for all other vaccinations if the patient presents a doctor's prescription for the vaccination. If the vaccination is carried out without a doctor's prescription, a flat fee of €9.60 is charged·

The flu vaccination is fully covered by French health insurance for risk groups, which include people over 65, the chronically ill, pregnant women and people with an increased risk of infection due to their occupation. The French health insurance system only covers 65% of the costs for many other vaccinations.

Pharmacists in Ireland have gradually been given more authority to administer vaccinations: since 2011, they have been legally authorised to offer seasonal flu vaccinations in pharmacies. In 2015, they were authorised to administer pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine and herpes zoster vaccine.

Since October 2020, appropriately trained pharmacists have been allowed to dispense and administer the flu vaccine at any suitable location, and since December 2020, they have also been allowed to dispense and administer Covid-19 vaccines as part of the national Covid-19 vaccination programme.

2.2 Ireland 2.2.1 Healthcare system

Ireland has a state healthcare system. The national health service, the Health Service Executive (HSE), is responsible for all residents of Ireland and is primarily funded by general tax revenue. Almost half of the population also takes out private health insurance to gain faster access to medical care.

Ireland has public pharmacies that are privately operated. There are both owner-operated independent pharmacies and pharmacy chains. Around two-thirds of pharmacies are independent (Institute for Local Self-Reliance 2003). In 2024, there were a total of 1,989 pharmacies, with 7,731 people licensed as public pharmacists (Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland 2025).

Pharmacies in Ireland are authorised to provide the following services (Health Service Executive 2025): vaccinations as explained below, blood pressure measurement, emergency contraception, issuing repeat prescriptions, dispensing Viagra CONNECT 50 mg and sumatriptan 50 mg after appropriate consultation.

2.2.2 Vaccinations by age group

Approximately 27% of all 1.2 million flu vaccinations administered to around 5.3 million residents in Ireland during the 2024/2025 season were carried out in pharmacies (Irish Pharmacy Union 2025). The analysis shows

that the vaccination site correlates significantly with age. Very young children and people aged 65 and over are predominantly vaccinated by doctors, while the proportion of vaccinations in pharmacies is considerable for the age groups two to 17 (45.3%), 18 to 40 (37.3%) and 50 to 64 (38.4%). Overall, the figures for Ireland suggest that among age groups with higher age-related contact with doctors (very young or older) , vaccinations are predominantly carried out by doctors, while a significant proportion of middle-aged people are vaccinated by pharmacists.

Development of the distribution of flu vaccinations among vaccinating institutions in per cent in Ireland

Alter	Impfung durch	2022/2023	2023/2024
06 bis 11 Monate	Hausarzt	78,7	75,6
	Apotheke	19,7	8,9
	Andere	1,6	15,5
12 bis 24 Monate	Hausarzt	90,7	91,5
	Apotheke	8,2	7,9
	Andere	1,1	0,6
2 bis 17 Jahre	Hausarzt	52,8	41,3
	Apotheke	44,3	45,3
	Andere	2,9	13,4
18 bis 49 Jahre	Hausarzt	44,1	41,9
	Apotheke	37,9	37,3
	Andere	18	20,8
50 bis 64 Jahre	Hausarzt	53,4	51,7
	Apotheke	37,7	38,4
	Andere	8,9	9,9
65 u. älter	Hausarzt	78,6	74,7
	Apotheke	16,7	20,1
	Andere	4,7	5,2
Gesamt	**Hausarzt**	**63**	**59,1**
	Apotheke	**29**	**30,7**
	Andere	**8**	**10,2**

Table 1: **Development of the distribution of flu vaccinations among vaccinating institutions in percent, Ireland 2022/2023 vs. 2023/2024. Simplified according to GP (general practitioner), pharmacy and "other" (inpatient and outpatient clinics, company doctors, others). Source: own representation IGES (Health Protection Surveillance Centre 2024, 2025). Note: The percentages for the very young age groups up to 24 months should be viewed with caution, as they are derived from very small numbers of people; vaccinations for very young children in pharmacies comprise a total of fewer than 20 people.**

For Ireland, this shows that pharmacists play a significant role in achieving high vaccination rates and contribute to Ireland's second place in the European comparison of flu vaccination rates.

When comparing vaccinations administered by pharmacists in Germany and Ireland, Ireland is far ahead of Germany for the 2022/2023 vaccination season, both in absolute numbers (374,050 in Ireland vs. 97,200 in Germany) and, above all, in terms of the percentage of the population vaccinated (7% in Ireland, 0.12% in Germany). On a population-weighted basis, around 61 times more people are vaccinated by pharmacists in Ireland than in Germany.

2.2.3 Requirements and remuneration

In order to be authorised to administer a vaccine, pharmacists must have successfully completed the PSI-approved training course for each vaccine. The pharmacy must have suitable premises, including a sufficiently private patient consultation area.

The HSE's remuneration for vaccination services during the 2023/2024 flu season was as follows: Covid-19 vaccinations were remunerated at €25 per vaccination, flu vaccinations at €15 plus an additional payment of €100 for every 10 individual patients. Vaccinations with the live nasal influenza vaccine for children were reimbursed at €20 per vaccination.

2.3 Switzerland 2.3.1 Healthcare system

In Switzerland, there is compulsory insurance, which means that all people living in Switzerland must take out health insurance of their choice. There are around 50 insurance companies that offer compulsory health insurance (OKP) (Swiss Confederation 2024). Insured persons pay monthly premiums, which vary in amount due to competition between the insurance companies.

Patients must contribute up to CHF 300 per year to the costs (excess). They can also choose a higher excess – up to CHF 2,500 – and then pay correspondingly lower premiums. Once the individual excess has been exceeded, the patient pays a 10% co-payment for each service – 20% for some medicines – up to a maximum amount of CHF 700.

2.3.2 Vaccinations, pharmacy authorisations and reimbursement

The administration of protective vaccinations is not regulated uniformly throughout Switzerland. There are both federal laws and regulations in the individual cantons. The vaccination schedule, which applies nationwide, determines which protective vaccinations are to be administered (Federal Office of Public Health 2025).

In 2015, pharmacists in the canton of Zurich were permitted to administer protective vaccinations against seasonal flu for the first time. Other cantons followed suit (Blasius 2016), and shortly afterwards, vaccinations against TBE were also permitted. The scope of vaccination authorisation varies from canton to canton. Over two-thirds of Swiss pharmacies offer vaccinations.

Pharmacists are only allowed to vaccinate healthy individuals aged 16 and over, but not children or patients with pre-existing conditions.

Pharmacists who obtained their federal diploma before 2022 must have completed the "FPH Vaccination and Blood Collection Certificate" training course. This takes a total of 20 hours (FPH Offizin 2025). As initial training in vaccination has been included in the basic course of study since 2022, pharmacists who obtained their diploma from 2022 onwards do not need this further training.

To obtain a vaccination licence, a valid BLS-AED certificate is also required. BLS (Basic Life Support) is awarded following training in basic life-saving measures. After completing the courses, a cantonal vaccination licence must be applied for and granted. This licence is issued on a personal basis and is generally valid for a specific pharmacy.

Vaccinations must be carried out in a separate area that is not visible and is acoustically isolated.

Vaccinations administered in pharmacies without a doctor's prescription are not covered by compulsory health insurance (OKP). If the vaccination is prescribed by a doctor, the cost of the vaccine is covered by OKP.[3] Pharmacists charge between CHF 20 and CHF 30 for administering the vaccine (Federal Office of Public Health 2024).

With the amendment of the Health Insurance Act (KVG) on 21 March 2025, the costs for the pharmacist's vaccination service (vaccine and administration) were included in the OKP's catalogue of services, provided that the vaccination is recommended in accordance with the Swiss vaccination schedule. The costs will be covered from 1 January 2027 (Federal Office of Public Health 2025,2).

3. Transferability of the results to Germany

In France, Ireland and Switzerland, pharmacists were initially only authorised to administer flu vaccinations. The extension to other vaccines was based on the positive experiences these countries had gained with flu vaccinations in pharmacies.

The positive experiences that France, Ireland and Switzerland had with flu vaccinations and later with COVID-19 vaccinations administered by pharmacists were the deciding factor in these countries to extend the vaccination competences of local pharmacists to other protective vaccinations. After the expansion of their powers, there were no efforts to restrict them again at any point. In Germany, too, the experience with flu vaccinations has been positive (Werthner). Since the countries considered have not had any negative experiences with the expansion of vaccination authorisations,it is unlikely that an expansion in Germany would have negative consequences (Plath 2025).

Influenza vaccination rates are the best available data source for examining the possible effects of pharmacists' vaccination authorisations on vaccination rates, and are available in varying degrees of completeness and time series from several sources (OECD 2025).

Analysis of influenza vaccination rates shows that authorisation to vaccinate was granted in Ireland as early as 2011, with further vaccinations added in 2015 – this did not initially lead to an immediate increase in the vaccination rate. This began to rise significantly between 2018 and 2019, i.e. even before the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Of the 1,900 pharmacies in Ireland, around 1,400 (73.4%) offer vaccinations (Irish Pharmacy Union 2025). No statement can be made for Germany with regard to the time series, as vaccination authorisation has only been in place nationwide since 2022 and only a few pharmacies have made use of it so far (around 1,400 out of 17,000 in 2024, corresponding to 8.2%).

Even if granting vaccination authorisation to pharmacists does not automatically lead to an increase in vaccination rates, the data from Ireland shows that it is a prerequisite for such an increase. This is because involving pharmacies makes it possible to reach the younger population in particular in a low-threshold manner.

Development of influenza vaccination rates among the population (>= 65 years*) and start of vaccination authorisation for pharmacists in Ireland, France, Germany and Switzerland 2004 – 2024

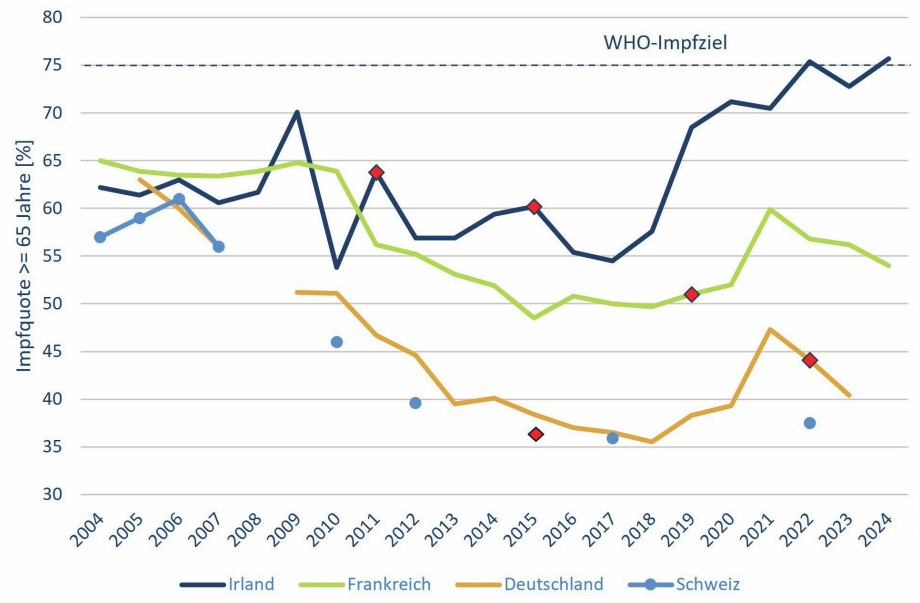


Fig. 2: **Development of influenza vaccination rates in the population >= 65 years* and start of vaccination eligibility for pharmacists in Ireland, France, Germany and Switzerland 2004–2024. Note: Years of initial vaccination eligibility for pharmacists marked in red for Ireland (2011, further from 2015), France (start of 2019) and Germany (2022, influenza and COVID-19, pilot phase not marked). In Switzerland, vaccination authorisations are granted depending on the canton, starting in 2015; the 2015 vaccination rate is not included in the data source, so the marked value has been interpolated. Legend: *The OECD points to a different definition for Germany, as it covers the population aged 60 and over rather than the population aged 65 and over.**

Influenza vaccination rates among younger people aged 18 to 59 with underlying health conditions in Germany

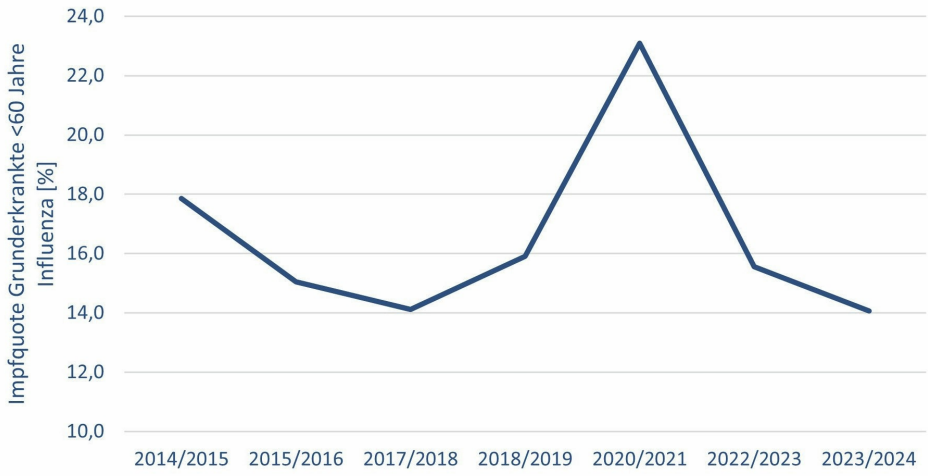


Fig. 3: **Influenza vaccination rates among younger people aged 18 to 59 with underlying health conditions in Germany. Source: own representation IGES (Robert Koch Institute 2025). Note: Raw data evaluated by year / influenza / persons with underlying health conditions / age groups 18–59, all federal states.**

3.1.1 Vulnerable groups

An evaluation of influenza vaccination rates among people with underlying conditions aged between 18 and 59 in Germany shows that even under the conditions of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, with a generally significantly increased willingness to be vaccinated against influenza, only a low vaccination rate of 23.1% was achieved. This figure was achieved from a very low starting level (14.1% in 2017/2018) and has fallen back to this

level within a very short time (14.1% in 2023/2024).

This observation supports the thesis that, similar to the observations in Ireland, the population between the ages of 18 and 59 is not sufficiently reached by doctors with regard to vaccinations.

3.2 Conclusions

The experiences of the European countries studied show that vaccinations in pharmacies have successfully established themselves as a low-threshold measure for vaccinating the population, complementing vaccinations in doctors' surgeries or other facilities. The example of Ireland shows that in countries with high vaccination rates, pharmacists carry out a significant percentage of vaccinations.

The low vaccination rates in Germany, which are significantly below the EU-27 average and well below the WHO vaccination rate target for influenza vaccination, for example, highlight both the need for action and the options for action.

Against this background, it is expedient that both the last and the current federal government are pursuing the path of expanding vaccination authorisations for pharmacists and "making the best possible use of pharmacists' knowledge in the interests of patients" (BMG 2023) in order to achieve "an increase in vaccination rates for certain vaccine-preventable diseases" (BMG 2024:24).

The analysis of the current situation shows that expanding the vaccination competences of pharmacists in Germany, following the example of the European countries examined, could have positive effects, while negative effects are unlikely. The low-threshold accessibility of pharmacies can contribute in particular to reaching previously underserved population groups and increasing overall vaccination rates.

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Keywords

Authorisation to vaccinate, pharmacies, vaccination rates, country comparisons

Citation

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Author declaration

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1: This article is a summary of the status analysis of the same title, available at https://iges.com/Schutzimpfungen-in-Apotheken

2: In the French overseas departments, a small surcharge is added to all vaccinations.

3: The exception was the vaccination against Covid-19.