

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Influenza Vaccination Policies

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Background

- The 2020/21 influenza season was unique due to the co-occurring COVID-19 pandemic which exerted significant strain on populations
- On September 2020, the WHO issued an interim guidance recommending countries to strengthen their NIPs against influenza¹

Objective

- The aim of this study was to review the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on influenza vaccination policies in France, UK and US

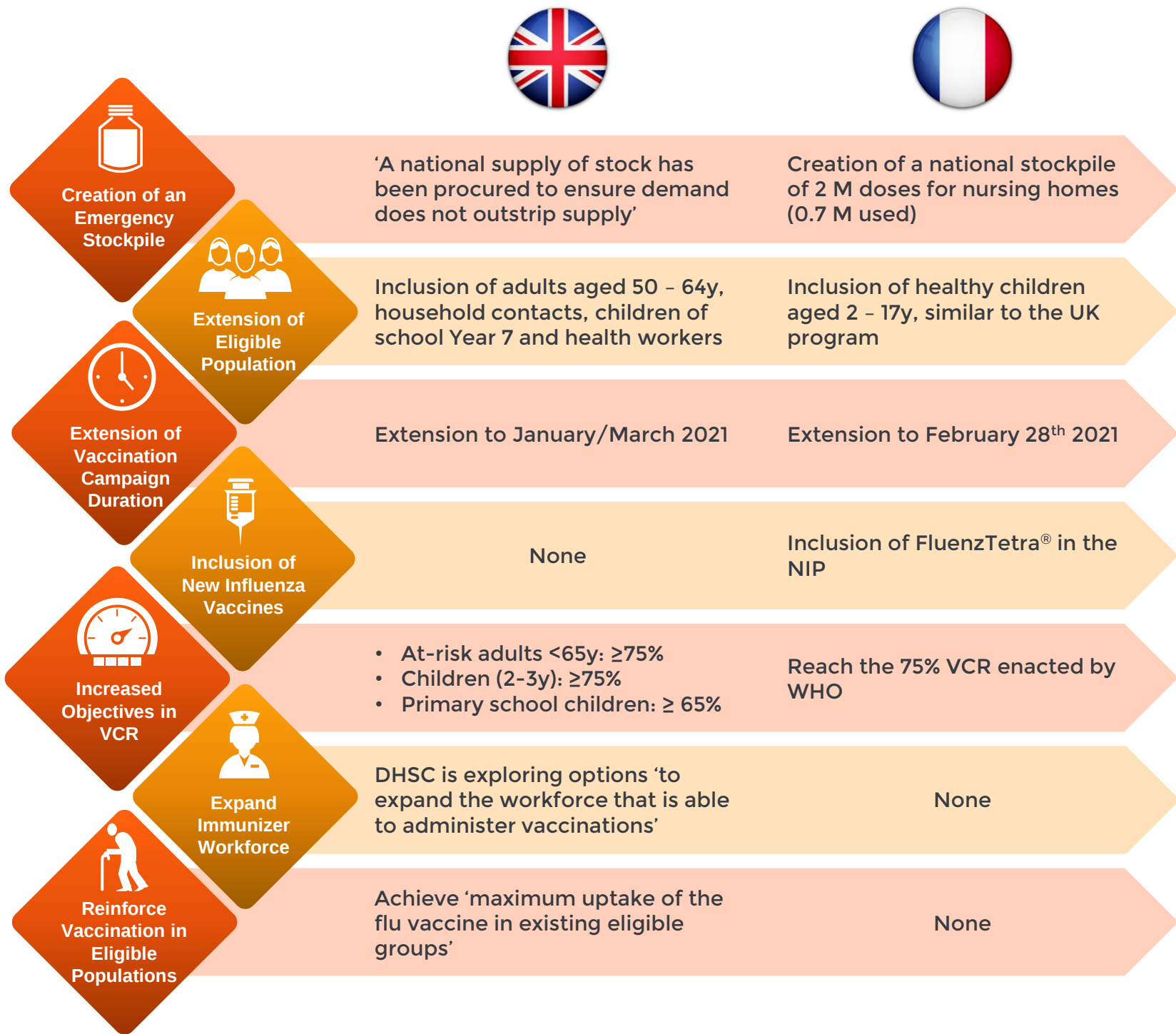
Methods

- Desk research was conducted in Google and Google Scholars to identify changes in vaccination policies for the 2020/21 season
- Geographic scope was limited to France, the UK, and the US

Results

- Modifications in influenza programs were observed for France and in the UK (Figure 1)^{2,3}
- No major adjustments were observed in the US as immunization against influenza is recommended for all individuals ≥6 months
- Most notable changes in France involved the addition of FluenzTetra® in the NIP and the creation of an emergency stockpile
- In the UK, influenza vaccination was extended to **four new populations** (adults 50 – 64y, household contacts, children of school Year 7 and health workers), and objectives in terms of VCR were revised upwards

Figure 1: Impact of COVID-19 on influenza immunization policies



Discussion

- Significant changes in influenza vaccination programs were observed for France and the UK, and were also noted in other countries such as Italy who also extended influenza vaccination to the 60 to 64y⁴
- As expected, changes in vaccination policies was associated with significant changes in VCR in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20:
 - 65+y: +7.9% ; +8.5% ; +5.7% in France, the UK and the US
 - At-risk adults <65y**: +7.7% and +8.1% in France and the UK
- Increases in VCR were observed in the US while no changes in policy were noted, illustrating that a clear distinction should be made between effects from the pandemic and those from the policies
- Figure 2 presents additional changes in influenza vaccination programs for the 2021/22 season
- As the pandemic is still active, the question of whether these changes will be **temporary** or maintained in the **long term** remains

Figure 2: Influenza vaccination programs for 2021/22



- Target VCR of 85% in adults ≥65y
- Extend immunization to all school children from Y7 to Y11
- Maintain immunization in healthy adults aged 50 – 64y
- Offer co-administration with COVID-19 vaccine where appropriate



- Cessation of vaccination in healthy children aged 2 – 17y
- Removal of FluenzTetra® from the NIP
- Upkeep of an emergency stockpile
- Offer co-administration with COVID-19 vaccine where appropriate

Abbreviations: DHSC, Department of Health and Social Care; NIP, National Immunization Programs; VCR, Vaccine Coverage Rate; WHO, World Health Organization

References: 1. World Health Organization. 2019. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336260>; 2. Direction Générale de la Santé. 2020. Available from: https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/dgs_urgent_n2020_59_mobilisation_stock_etat_vaccins_grippe.pdf; 3. NHS. 2020. Available from: https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Letter_AnnualFlu_2020-21_20200805.pdf; 4. Ministero della Salute. 2020. Available from: https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/news/p3_2_1_1.jsp?menu=notizie&id=4859