

The Need for Including Hepatitis a Vaccine in Routine Childhood Immunization Programs in Europe as a Response to the Influx of Refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regions

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Abstract : The world is facing an unprecedented displacement crisis. Recently, over 1.1 million asylum seekers have been granted protection status in the European Union (EU). The majority of these asylum seekers were from countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This influx carries with it a potential introduction of infectious diseases that have been eliminated in the EU, which poses a challenge for EU health authorities. Compared to MENA region countries where Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) endemicity is high to intermediate, member states of the EU show very low (Western Europe) to low (Eastern Europe) levels of HAV endemicity. Because of this situation, there is an ongoing public health concern in high-income countries, like members of the EU, that many adults remain susceptible to HAV outbreaks. The overwhelming majority of the EU members' states do not include HAV vaccine in their immunization calendars. Hence, this paper urgently calls for the implementation of new policies regarding HAV in EU members' states.

Keywords : European union, hepatitis A, MENA region refugees, vaccine preventable diseases

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