



GLOBAL HEALTH PODCAST SPECIAL ON COVID-19

A REPORT ON THE KEY DISCUSSIONS AND TAKEAWAYS



Navigation Panel (Click to go to that section)

1. Key takeaways
2. Improving COVID-19 vaccine confidence with Dr. Emilie Karafillakis | European Director, Vaccine Confidence Project
3. Long COVID with Prof Danny Altmann | Professor of Immunology, Imperial College London
4. Update on Virology with Prof Bruno Lina | Director, Virologie et Pathologies Humaines (VirPath)
5. COVID-19 vaccination in peacetime with Prof Pier Luigi Lopalco | Professor of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, University of Pisa
6. COVID-19 experience in children with Prof Federico Martín-Torres | Head of Paediatrics, Hospital Clínico Universitario de Santiago
7. Summing up the Global Health Cast series with Prof Joe Schmitt & Prof Catherine Weil-Olivier

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1. Key takeaways

Enhance Vaccine Communication and Education

- Strengthen public messaging on the historical development and safety of vaccines.
- Incorporate comprehensive life-long vaccine education into medical training.
- Initiate vaccine education programs targeting adolescents.

Address Misinformation and Build Trust

- Actively counter dis- and misinformation, oriented towards all stakeholders, especially on social media.
- Foster trust through transparent and empathetic communication at the local level.

Improve Public Health Preparedness

- Develop robust preparedness plans for future pandemics, including communication strategies.
- Integrate vaccination within the broader health promotion framework.

Research and Management of long COVID

- Accelerate research on the pathogenesis and treatment of long COVID.
- Establish dedicated care pathways for long COVID patients.
- Inform the different stakeholders, including the public on the realities and socio-economic impacts of long COVID.

Vigilant Surveillance and Responsive Healthcare Systems

- Maintain genomic and wastewater surveillance to monitor the ongoing viral mutations.
- Prepare healthcare systems for potential surges in respiratory diseases.

Routine and Seasonal Vaccination Strategies

- Transition COVID-19 pandemic vaccination to a routine, seasonal, sustainable model.
- Implement co-administration strategies for vaccination against respiratory viral diseases (COVID-19, influenza and RSV vaccines), focusing on older adults and high-risk groups.
- Develop innovative communication strategies to counter vaccine fatigue.

Tailored Approaches for Vulnerable Populations

- Prioritize prevention (among which vaccination) and specialised care for older adults and high-risk groups, including children with comorbidities.
- Adapt public health strategies to different demographic risks, such as lower risk in healthy children.

Global Health and Pandemic Preparedness

- Recognize the importance of a One Health approach, acknowledging the interconnection of human, animal, and environmental health.
- Establishing a common market for purchasing COVID-19 vaccines by the European Union was a novel and successful initiative during the pandemic
- It demonstrated the strength of collaborative action in addressing unprecedented public health challenges and set a precedent for future collective health initiatives within the EU.

2. Improving COVID-19 vaccine confidence with Dr. Emilie Karafillakis | European Director, Vaccine Confidence Project



"Vaccines and RNA didn't come from nowhere. It came from years of research on cancer and vaccines, including trials and other scientific backgrounds that existed. But this wasn't communicated well enough, making people fearful that these vaccines were created quickly. We need to take notice of these lessons so that when the next pandemic happens, which who knows when will happen, we have better preparedness plans for communication."

The pandemic highlighted the dynamic nature of vaccine confidence. Initially, there was high confidence and willingness to vaccinate and receive vaccines due to fears surrounding COVID-19. As the situation evolved with less dangerous variants and effective vaccines, fear decreased, and so did willingness. Yet, maintaining vaccine confidence outside of an emergency presents challenges that must be addressed to support booster doses and seasonal influenza vaccination uptake.

Misinformation, particularly propagated through social media, has significantly shaped public attitudes towards vaccines. This misinformation has affected confidence in various vaccines, not just COVID-19, leading to temporary decreases in vaccine uptake.

Calls to action and critical points

Healthcare professionals are the public's most trusted source of vaccine information, but they often lack sufficient training in vaccinology. We need more comprehensive education focusing specifically on vaccines/vaccination strategies during medical training and after. Improving communication skills among healthcare professionals regarding their patients' vaccination is also critical. There's a disparity in how healthcare professionals view their role in vaccine promotion, with some seeing it as purely informational and others as more proactive.

Local-level engagement and addressing public concerns with respect and empathy are crucial. Adopting a grassroots approach to build vaccine confidence, where local communities are actively involved and their voices are heard, is the first step toward sound communication and co-designed health strategies. Engagement should not just be about disseminating information; it should include dialogues and co-design interventions with community input.

Vaccine education during adolescence. Early vaccine education, from 7 to 10 years of age, particularly among adolescents, is crucial in shaping future perceptions and attitudes towards vaccination. We must address the information needs of teens, highly influenced by media and their peers. They could be critical vectors for changing future perceptions of immunisation. Education in schools is vital to long-term vaccine confidence through improving health and science literacy by integrating vaccination education into health science courses to impart unbiased and objective information about vaccines. We must support the current and future population by developing critical thinking skills in children and adolescents to assess health information independently.

Lessons from COVID-19 stress the need for anticipation and better preparedness, especially regarding communication strategies. Emphasising preparedness, learning from the COVID-19 experience, and improving communication strategies to address public fears and

concerns is essential. For example, learning from the missteps during the pandemic, like the initial communication around mRNA vaccines, to improve future public health responses.

Integration of Vaccination in Health Promotion: routine vaccination programs should be part of a broader health promotion agenda, addressing it with other health and societal aspects.

YouTube views: 3,900. [Watch the interview in full](#)

3. Long COVID with Prof Danny Altmann | Professor of Immunology, Imperial College London



"It's one of those public health problems that's very difficult territory for politicians and policymakers. If you're told that a proportion of your population might be in poor health using health services or not going to work for the coming years, it could be your problem. It could be the next government's problem or anybody else's problem. It's a strange kind of health emergency to try and get people to address."

Generating the public and political will to address the long COVID effectively is challenging. Approximately 10% of COVID-19 patients develop long COVID, defined as persistent symptoms that last for more than three months, which translates into a significant global health issue with profound public health implications. Long COVID affects various demographics, including children and active, healthy adults, albeit less than vulnerable and older adults. Long COVID is associated with the persistence of the virus in different organs.

Calls to action and critical points

Accelerated and collaborative research efforts are needed to understand the mechanisms of long COVID better and develop effective treatments. The pathogenesis of long COVID is multifaceted, involving aspects like direct viral damage, modified immune responses, and potential autoimmunity. Research is ongoing, but there has yet to be a definitive answer. This includes sufficient funding to conduct adequate research.

It is vital to raise public awareness about the realities of long COVID, dispel myths, and understand its socio-economic impacts. Addressing misconceptions about long COVID, such as it being a psychological issue or limited to certain social classes, is crucial.

Developing dedicated care pathways and multi-disciplinary approaches to manage long COVID patients is crucial. The development of treatments is slow, partly due to the complexity of the condition. The current approach is symptom management, emphasising a multi-disciplinary approach to address various symptoms.

The best way to not get long COVID is not to get COVID, and the best way to not get COVID-19 is to be effectively vaccinated. However, many unknowns remain regarding the positive relationship between vaccination and the reduction of long COVID ongoing symptoms. So far, evidence is inconclusive about vaccination helping people reduce the virus reservoir and help people with their symptoms. Other research suggests it made people worse, and some research shows no change.

Integration with Other Post-Viral Conditions could help us enhance our understanding of viral mechanisms and treatment approaches. There appear to be parallels and similarities across long-covid and other post-viral conditions like post-viral fatigue syndrome, which require further investigation.

YouTube views: 1,200 [Watch the interview in full.](#)

4. Update on Virology with Prof Bruno Lina | Director, Virologie et Pathologies Humaines (VirPath)



“Respiratory viruses can be challenging to predict. They evolve in their own way, and we don’t know everything going on, so we have surprises. We must be aware of that and adapt to those surprises. ”

SARS-CoV-2 still presents ongoing challenges, including the emergence of new variants like BA.2.86 and their characteristics. The dynamic nature of the virus highlights the critical role of maintaining population vaccination uptake of boosters, which address the latest dominant variant of concern or interest as defined by the WHO. This is important for preparedness as we approach the seasonal respiratory disease season with the overlapping of multiple circulating viruses, including COVID-19, influenza, and RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus).

Calls to action and critical points

The public should remain alert and adhere to health guidelines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This includes adopting preventative measures such as wearing masks (especially when ill), frequent handwashing, and ensuring proper indoor ventilation. These practices are crucial in maintaining public health safety.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is vital, particularly for vulnerable groups. It's essential to consider the possibility of co-administering the COVID-19 vaccine with the influenza vaccine. Such measures protect against current and emerging COVID-19 variants and the other seasonal viruses in circulation.

Continuous genomic surveillance is critical to tracking COVID-19's evolution and adapting public health strategies effectively. Both genomic and wastewater surveillance play a significant role in monitoring the spread and mutation of the virus, which is critical for informed public health responses.

Healthcare systems must brace for a challenging respiratory disease season, including COVID-19, influenza, and RSV. The upcoming respiratory season is projected to see a rise in these cases, presenting challenges for healthcare systems. Effective communication about the virus's evolving nature, vaccine importance, and other preventative public health measures is essential for public education and preparedness.

YouTube views: 1,100 [Watch the interview in full.](#)

5. COVID-19 vaccination in peacetime with Prof Pier Luigi Lopalco | Professor of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, University of Pisa



“We know that implementing the influenza vaccination is not a joke. It requires a lot of resources. So I think that even though COVID-19 is not yet perfectly synchronised with the autumn-winter [respiratory disease] season, the best option is to combine COVID-19 and influenza vaccination and set up a joint seasonal vaccination campaign.”

The transition of COVID-19 vaccination efforts from an emergency phase to a more routine, "peacetime" approach comes with specific challenges, including evolving vaccination strategies in line with the population's needs and maintaining public and healthcare system interest in ongoing vaccination programs.

Calls to action and critical points

Transitioning to a routine vaccination program necessitates evaluating public health strategies and vaccine distribution methods. This shift requires a balanced approach to ensure continued vigilance against COVID-19 while integrating the vaccine into regular healthcare practices.

Vaccine fatigue poses a significant challenge, reducing the urgency and demand for COVID-19 vaccines among the public and healthcare workers. Overcoming this requires innovative communication strategies and renewed efforts to highlight the ongoing importance of vaccination.

Seasonal co-administration of the COVID-19 vaccination with influenza for the ageing population and high-risk groups can improve coverage and convenience. Similar to flu vaccination, these campaigns are critical in protecting vulnerable populations and adapting to the changing nature of the virus. This approach can increase overall vaccination rates and make vaccination more accessible. Delivering vaccines through pharmacies and community centres can significantly increase vaccination rates. Reducing barriers to access is critical to ensuring widespread vaccine uptake, especially in underserved communities.

Effectively implementing vaccination campaigns involves addressing logistical, educational, prioritisation and accessibility challenges. Innovative solutions and adaptive strategies are needed to meet these challenges head-on. Prioritising high-risk groups, including older adults, healthcare workers, and those of all ages with comorbidities, for vaccination is crucial. Targeted strategies can help protect the most vulnerable groups of the population.

As the sense of emergency wanes, enhancing public education and communication about the need for ongoing COVID-19 vaccination becomes increasingly important. Effective messaging and outreach are essential in keeping the public informed and engaged.

Continuous monitoring of vaccine safety and effectiveness against new variants is essential. This vigilance allows for timely adjustments to vaccination strategies, ensuring they remain effective against evolving strains of the virus. Delivering data regularly to HCPs and the public is vital to increase their motivation.

Continued reassurance about the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines and the typical nature of side effects is vital in maintaining public trust. Transparent communication about vaccine safety and side effect management is crucial for ongoing vaccination efforts.

YouTube views: 1000 [Watch the interview in full.](#)

6. COVID-19 experience in children with Prof Federico Martín-Torres | Head of Paediatrics, Hospital Clínico Universitario de Santiago



"There is a global agreement that any child with a risk factor or comorbid condition predisposing to severe COVID-19 should be vaccinated. Another story is what to do with the universal vaccination of otherwise healthy children. And then here, we can say that it is safe and efficacious, but we need to consider if it is efficient from a public health perspective, compared to other priority age groups".

COVID-19 typically manifests less severely in children than in adults. Hospitalisations when a systematic sampling finds the SARS-Cov2 are, in fact, often due to other causes. Secondly, the threat posed by Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) has decreased over time due to improved understanding, management, and new variants. Thirdly, COVID-19 vaccines have been confirmed as safe and effective for children, with rare side effects. Additionally, Long COVID appears less frequent and severe in children, and symptoms usually resolve within a year. However, children with certain health conditions, like type 1 diabetes or heart problems, face a higher risk of severe COVID-19.

Calls to action and critical points

Adapt public health strategies to reflect the lower risk of severe COVID-19 in children than adults, reducing unnecessary alarm and focusing resources where most needed.

We must ensure the continued safety and effectiveness of the vaccines and communicate these findings transparently to build public trust. Clinical trials and real-life data confirm the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines in children. Side effects like myocarditis are rare and usually without severe consequences.

Prioritise vaccination and provide specialised care for children with comorbidities, such as type 1 diabetes or heart conditions, who are more vulnerable to severe COVID-19. Regularly reassess the need and approach for vaccinating healthy children, balancing it with evolving virologic data and other public health priorities.

Tailor Public Health Strategies for Children: Develop and implement public health strategies specifically designed for the paediatric population, reflecting their lower risk of severe COVID-19. Consider the need and priority for universal vaccination of healthy children, balancing it against other public health priorities.

YouTube views: 643 [Watch the interview in full.](#)

7. Summing up the Global Health Cast series with Prof Joe Schmitt & Prof Catherine Weil-Olivier



The final episode of the Global Health Cast Special on COVID-19 served as a summary and reflection on the key topics discussed throughout the series.

General practitioners play a vital role in building confidence in vaccines. It emphasised the need for high-quality data, clear and transparent communication, and continuous updates on vaccine safety and effectiveness to maintain public trust.

Diagnosing long COVID and understanding its pathogenesis is still challenging, with many unknowns. The episode addressed the unpredictability of who might develop long COVID and the absence of specific biological criteria and treatments, underscoring the importance of preventive measures.

The update of COVID-19 vaccines addresses novel variants of concern/variants of interest and seasonal boosters. Both hosts pointed out the potential necessity for seasonal COVID-19 vaccinations, like those for influenza and RSV. It stressed the importance of vaccinating older adults and high-risk individuals of any age and carefully followed up adapting strategies based on evolving scientific knowledge.

While COVID-19 is generally less severe in children, there are exceptions. Hosts debated the need for universal vaccination in children, focusing on vaccinating those in high-risk paediatric groups.

Based on historical and current trends, another pandemic is inevitable. The episode discussed the importance of preparedness, anticipation and readiness for future pandemics, long-term ongoing surveillance, vaccine development, and the One Health approach, which recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health.

Life-course immunisation is a critical strategy in public health which can mitigate some of the most severe pandemic risks and prepare for future challenges. The wrap-up of the series underscored the complexities of this sudden and unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, the progress made in understanding and managing the new virus, the benefit of the vaccines, limiting in the population the most severe consequences and the importance of preparedness for future global health challenges.

Establishing a common market for purchasing COVID-19 vaccines by the European Union was a novel and successful initiative during the pandemic. The EU Vaccines Strategy was developed to ensure that all member states had equitable access to vaccines, regardless of size or economic power. It demonstrated the strength of collaborative action in addressing public health challenges and set a precedent for future collective health initiatives within the EU.

YouTube views: 748 [Watch the interview in full.](#)