



# Semi-annual Bulletin

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Word of the volume..... 3**

**International updates on Influenza ..... 4**

Noticeable decline of influenza virus activity in the era of COVID19

COVID19 pandemic had a positive effect on the Influenza vaccine

Influenza viruses could be more serious in pediatrics compared to COVID19

Community acquired bacteremia is more common among influenza viruses compared to COVID19

A call for a global surveillance network for respiratory viruses in the near future

**Activities of ME’NA-ISN..... 5**

New Horizons in the outlook, congress, January 22nd -24th 2021

Influenza and the diabetic patient webinar, April 8th 2021

Influenza in health care workers and the role of vaccination, webinar, June 10th 2021

Influenza in the spotlight, webinar, September 4th 2021

**Publications of ME’NA-ISN..... 6**

**Current projects of ME’NA-ISN ..... 7**

VACCiMENA-Health Care Providers project

**Learning tools..... 8**

Influenza sentinel surveillance training (WHO)

Prevention and Control of Seasonal Influenza in 2020-2021 (CDC)

Bats, Ducks, and Pandemics: An Introduction to One Health Policy (Coursera)





## Word of the volume



*Chairperson of Middle East, Eurasia And Africa Influenza Stakeholders Network (ME'NA-ISN)*

Dr. Salah Al Awaidy is a medical doctor, and holds a Masters in Epidemiology with current post of Communicable Disease Surveillance and Control Adviser to the office of the Undersecretary of Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health, Oman. He currently advises on eradication, elimination and control of communicable diseases of public health importance, in addition to the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), vaccine supply chain system and International Health Regulations.

From 1997 to 2012, Dr. Al Awaidy held the post of Director of Communicable Disease Surveillance and Control, MOH, Oman.

He played a pivotal role in reducing the national under five mortality and morbidity, preparedness, management and control of infectious diseases like SARS, avian influenza, pH1N1 and in establishing national communicable diseases, AEFI and Rotavirus surveillance, as well as in the eradication of Polio, Measles, Rubella, CRS and leprosy in Oman. In addition, he played a fundamental role in reducing mortality and morbidity of vaccine-preventable diseases for pediatric, adolescence and adult populations.

Under his leadership, Oman achieved Polio-free, Measles-free, Rubella-free, Dranculosis-free and CRS-free status, neonatal tetanus elimination and control and near elimination of Hepatitis B and other VPDs like TB and Schistosomiasis. Oman received the first ever certification that the Central Vaccine Store fulfilled all the criteria expected of WHO/UNICEF in 2003 and 2004.

As a result, Oman has achieved and maintained almost 99% immunization coverage regionally and nationally. In June 2012, he was honoured by the CDC as the highest achieving person in Oman. In the international arena, Dr. Al Awaidy has represented a number of important global advisory groups, namely the TAG on Poliomyelitis Eradication in Pakistan & Afghanistan since 2013, Advisory Group on Immunization (SAGE), WHO Geneva (2005-2007), Strategic Advisory Group on Vaccine and Store Management Training Courses (2005-2008), Strategic TB Advisory Board (2007-2011), the AIDS Regional Advisory Group (ARAG), EMRO since 2005 and he has been a member of the GAVI Independent Review Committee since 2014. He also currently serves on the IHR Emergency Committee on Polio and MERS-CoV. He has been a member of the polio Transient Independent Monitoring Board (TIMB) and Polio RTAG as well as a member of the regional verification commission for Hepatitis B control, the EU diabetes and influenza group, the Global Task Team of Pandemic Influenza Vaccine Response WHO, HQ, -2020-till date and Global Task Team of Influenza disease burden-2019-till date WHO, HQ as well as chairperson for ME'NA-ISN association.

I am delighted and privileged to welcome you to our inaugural ME'NA-ISN bulletin. We believe it is our duty to continuously enhance the scientific excellence of our ME'NA-ISN area.

The ME'NA-ISN vision is that the countries in the area have a realism and implementation of an influenza immunization program and pandemic influenza preparedness and response plan, with informed incorporation of seasonal influenza vaccination into national vaccination programmes as a basis to minimize health, the economic and social repercussions of a possible influenza pandemic. This undoubtedly plays an important role in mitigating the health, economic and social impacts of a potential influenza pandemic.

ME'NA-ISN also aims to empower countries to protect their populations from threats of influenza. It also envisions a partnership with and within countries through global and regional initiatives to strengthen national pandemic influenza preparedness and response capacity. The synergy of public-private partnerships, aligned with national policies, strategies and plans, enables the achievement of this objective.

To achieve our goal, the bulletin addresses the most recent influenza information in the region.

In addition, the bulletin will present various perspectives and experiences on how best to address the challenges associated with influenza.

**Salah Al Awaidy**

## International updates on Influenza



### Noticeable decline of influenza virus activity in the era of COVID19

Interesting analysis through the ongoing surveillance system in some regions of India has

proved that the transmission of the influenza virus has dramatically declined to virtually zero activity. The vaccination rate among the studied sample did not exceed 5%, and thus most probably this decline is attributed to the extensive preventive measures against COVID-19. The question is: would the same preventive measures be advised to control influenza outbreaks in any part of this world in the future?

[Read more](#)



### COVID19 pandemic had a positive effect on the Influenza vaccine

The current pandemic has reinforced the need for vaccination. It is still possible that

many who were not in favor for vaccination, have changed their minds. This has been proved in a study from the UK which found interesting results. More than half of people who were eligible but not vaccinated in the previous year, intended to receive the vaccine in the 2020/2021 season. However, the minority of those still refused the vaccine, but their refusal was still attributed to misinformation. It is therefore important to utilize the current pandemic for more enforcement on vaccination, and also to correct the misinformation everywhere.

[Read more](#)



### Influenza viruses could be more serious in pediatrics compared to COVID19

While the majority of people are only occupied with the threat of COVID-19, a study from China

showed that the effect of influenza viruses among children is even worse than the effect of COVID-19. Apart from

the longer length of stay which is expected with COVID-19 patients, children with influenza virus infection had more severe illness and more complications. The myocardial enzymes were remarkably higher among patients with influenza A (19.7%) and B (18.1%), compared to COVID19 patients (7.3%).

[Read more](#)



### Community acquired bacteremia is more common among influenza viruses compared to COVID19

In the light of low incidence of bacterial infections among

COVID-19 patients, a study was performed in the Netherlands to compare the incidence rate of infections with bacteremia among patients with influenza and COVID-19. The occurrence of clinically relevant bacteremia among Influenza A and Influenza B were 4% and 3%, respectively, compared to 1% in COVID-19 patients.

[Read more](#)



### A call for a global surveillance network for respiratory viruses in the near future

The authors raise questions on the uncertain future of the

respiratory viruses including influenza and how the measures adopted against the current pandemic would affect them. Theoretically as there is substantial reduction in the influenza transmission, the likelihood of more mutations may decrease. However, it is also possible that more epidemiological related characteristics would change, for instance, the seasonality of the viruses may get affected due to the accumulative pooling of susceptible population. In addition, the viruses may change their contagiousness to subpopulations within the time before the pandemic of COVID-19. This paper urges the need for an effective global surveillance system which is able to share the information and integrate the epidemiological, genome sequencing, and clinical data.

[Read more](#)



## Activities of ME'NA-ISN

### New Horizons in the outlook, Congress, January 22<sup>nd</sup> -24<sup>th</sup> 2021

The MENA-ISN Congress 2021 was held virtually on 22-24 January 2021 with the theme "Flu vaccination: New horizons in the Outlook". The congress took place over three days, with day one and day three taking the form of plenary sessions and day two consisting mainly of Networking Sessions. Hacettepe University Vaccine Institute, International Federation on Ageing, APIC/EGYPT Chapter (ESIC) and EMRNIC supported the Congress.

The scientific programme was organized in four main domains:

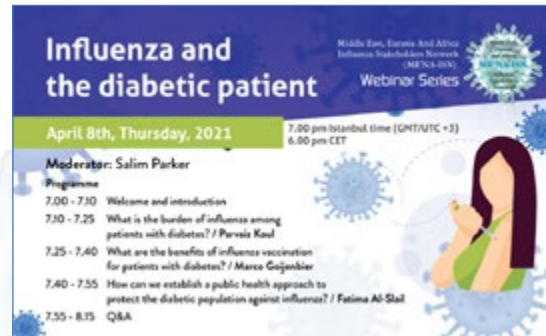
Policies, strategies and plans; Immunization behavior; Research gaps; Economics of influenza

Participants from 24 different countries all around the world attended the congress. The details of the Scientific Programme, Committees and Speakers are available in the congress website

Details are available: <https://mena-isn-congress2021.org/webinar/>



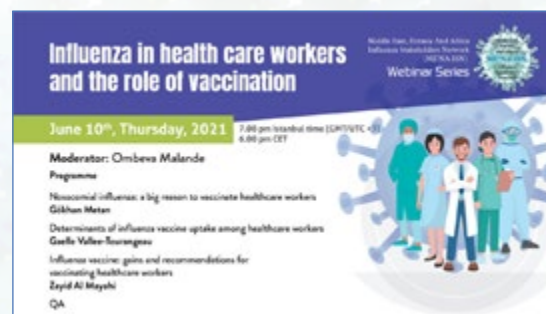
### Influenza and the diabetic patient webinar, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2021



In this webinar, we have focused mainly on diabetic patients. We understand that they are at risk of more frequent and severe complications when they contract influenza. It was an opportunity to discuss the burden of

influenza among diabetics, and also the benefits of the influenza vaccine. Speakers have also discussed public health interventions needed to protect diabetic patients against influenza.

### Influenza in health care workers and the role of vaccination, webinar, June 10<sup>th</sup> 2021



It remains a big concern to ensure the protection of health care workers everywhere, in order to provide the care safely. It is important to also prevent the transmission inside the hospitals, and

health care workers are the key to break the transmission chain by respecting to infection control precautions and receiving influenza vaccine shots. However, the uptake of vaccine in this group is still far from the targets. Therefore we also aimed to understand the reasons behind that in this webinar, and to reflect on the gains by improving the vaccination coverage rates among healthcare workers.

## UPCOMING EVENT!

### Influenza in the spotlight, webinar, September 4<sup>th</sup> 2021



We wish to see you all in our Influenza Day. We are sure there are many concerns about the current pandemic and its relation and subsequences on other viruses. We will be discussing several

issues in this regard with the participation of internationally well-known experts in this field. Please mark your calendars and register for this exciting event!

# Publications of ME'NA-ISN

- 1 **Influenza surveillance in Middle East, North, East and South Africa: Report of the 8th MENA Influenza Stakeholders Network**

<https://doi.org/10.1111/irv.12628>



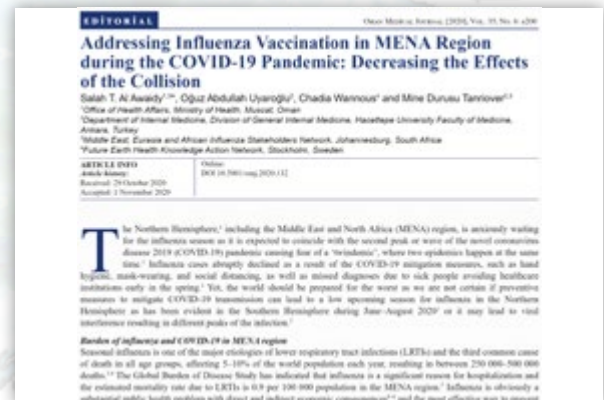
- 2 **Influenza vaccination situation in Middle-East and North Africa countries: Report of the 7th MENA Influenza Stakeholders Network (MENA-ISN)**

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jiph.2018.07.003>



- 3 **Addressing Influenza Vaccination in MENA Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Decreasing the Effects of the Collision**

[doi: 10.5001/omj.2020.132](https://doi.org/10.5001/omj.2020.132)



- 4 **A Snapshot of Influenza Surveillance, Vaccine Recommendations, and Vaccine Access, Drivers, and Barriers in Selected Middle Eastern and North African Countries**

[doi: 10.5001/omj.2018.54](https://doi.org/10.5001/omj.2018.54)





## Current projects of ME'NA-ISN

### VACCIMENA-Health Care Providers project

The Middle East, Eurasia and Africa Influenza Stakeholders Network (ME'NA-ISN) aims at supporting member countries in developing, maintaining, upgrading and implementing national pandemic influenza preparedness and response plans aligned with the vision of a resilient world in the face of pandemic influenza.

The ME'NA (expanded) region comprises both the poorest and richest countries in the world. Data on influenza vaccination coverage rates is very scarce. To better understand the influenza vaccination dynamics, ME'NA-ISN seeks to initiate an engagement plan targeted at healthcare professionals in the Region, with the ultimate intent of improving their engagement and support for flu vaccination. In this regard VACCIMENA-Health Care Providers project aims to:

- gain a better understanding of the barriers faced by health care workers in the Region with regards to flu vaccination, including their sentiments towards the flu vaccine and vaccination advocacy;
- identify and overcome psychological barriers to personal flu vaccination decisions among healthcare workers in the Region;
- identify healthcare workers' challenges in relation to vaccination advocacy;

A behavioural insight analysis of health practitioners' flu vaccination decisions and engagement with vaccination advocacy will be carried out in different countries of the Region using a survey methodology.



## Learning tools



### Influenza sentinel surveillance training (WHO)

This self-paced, online course provides a general overview of influenza as well as in-depth training on the purpose and procedures involved in conducting sentinel influenza surveillance. Participants learn through a combination of online lectures with interactive content and downloadable scenario-based activities that help them apply the concepts learned.

<https://openwho.org/courses/influenza-sentinel-surveillance>

### Prevention and Control of Seasonal Influenza in 2020-2021 (CDC)

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, influenza remains a critical threat to public health, prompting continued clinical attention, guideline revision, and novel antiviral drug development.

Are you prepared for flu season during the COVID-19 pandemic? In this video, leading experts share interprofessional strategies for quick diagnosis, identifying patients at high risk for complications, and initiating treatment.

Tune in to hear:

- Updates on the latest influenza guidelines
- Advances in antiviral treatment
- Strategies for improving influenza patient outcomes

<https://www.train.org/cdctrain/course/1095307/>



### Bats, Ducks, and Pandemics: An Introduction to One Health Policy (Coursera)

One Health is the concept that human, animal, and environmental/ecosystem health are linked. The concept provides a useful framework for examining complex health issues such as food safety and security, emerging and vector-borne diseases, and antimicrobial resistance. It can be used to analyze government policies to determine if they are effective in improving health and well-being. Agriculture is the foundation of civilization. This interdisciplinary course will cover diverse subjects such as basic epidemiology, public health, public policy, basic microbiology, food safety, and security, zoonotic diseases, sanitation and hygiene, antimicrobial resistance, environmental and ecosystem

health, and the national and international organizations that oversee health, agriculture, and the environment. Disease outbreaks including Influenza, Q fever, and Ebola will be discussed. While the course was developed and recorded before the COVID-19 pandemic, the concepts learned very much apply to it. This course emphasizes holistic, not siloed, approaches to health, and disease.

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/onehealth>



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**WE ARE GLAD TO INVITE YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS  
BULLETIN AND OUR ASSOCIATION**

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