WHAT ABOUT RESPIRATORY VIRUS INFECTIONS?

Prevention for people living with diabetes in Covid times

SUMMARY REPORT
The IDC webinar was organised in connection with World Diabetes Day 2021 and the theme ‘Access to Diabetes Care’. The programme features best practice examples on prevention from health care practitioners, a science focused session, followed by a panel discussion. The panel included people living with diabetes.

**PROGRAMME**

14:30  
**Opening and welcome by chairs**  
Dr. Marco Goeijenbier  
Chair IDC

Dr. Konstantinos Makrilakis  
Board Member IDF Europe

14:40  
**Best practice examples on prevention**  
Daniel Howarth  
Head of Care, Diabetes UK

Dr. Robert Gabbay, MD  
Chief Scientific and Medical Officer, American Diabetes Association

15:00  
**Science session**  
Respiratory viral infections and diabetes – what have we learnt from COVID-19?  
Dr. Kirsty Short  
School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences, University of Queensland

15:30  
**Panel Discussion**  
Q&A with co-chairs, speakers and Ms Sebnem Guneyman  
Ms Sebnem Guneyman  
Diabetes Advocate, living with T1D

15:55  
**Closing remarks and take home message**  
Prof. Ab Osterhaus  
Chair ESWI
The Influenza Diabetes Community united scientists, healthcare professionals, stakeholders and patients on 16 November to discuss protecting diabetes patients from severe respiratory virus infections. A key take-away is that tailored and targeted messaging is key to communicating the benefit of vaccination for flu and COVID-19. We should be aware of complacency when it comes to seasonal respiratory viral infections. Reaching out to risk group patients to get vaccinated remains a priority.

The event was truly global in outreach, featuring distinguished speakers from Australia, the EU, Turkey, the UK, and the US. Co-chaired by Dr Marco Goeijenbier, Chair of IDC and Dr Konstantinos Makrilakis, Board Member IDF Europe, the webinar was divided into three sessions: best practice examples on prevention; a focus on science; followed by a panel discussion. Prof. Ab Osterhaus, Chair ESWI summed up and concluded the webinar with key takeaway messages.

Daniel Howarth, Head of Care, Diabetes UK gave the example of their proactive approach and tailored messaging in reaching risk groups to vaccinate. He explained how using social media, press articles, partnerships, and working closely with the NHS, influenced the uptake of the flu jab positively in the UK in 2020.

Dr Robert Gabbay, MD and Chief Scientific and Medical Officer, American Diabetes Association emphasised the need for health equity and talked about the Health Equity Bill of Rights created by the American Diabetes Association. He further underlined that 40% of Americans who have died of COVID-19 have had diabetes. Also, in the US, Black Communities bear a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 and flu illness along with lower flu vaccination rates. According to his experience a collaborative, goal-oriented communication style is more effective in achieving a change of behaviour, based on trust, knowledge and removal of barriers to care.

In her presentation entitled “Respiratory viral infections and diabetes – what have we learned from COVID-19”, Dr Kirsty Short, School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences, the University of Queensland, shared research that demonstrates that diabetes increases the risk of severe COVID-19. Studies show that high glycaemic variability is associated with COVID-19 progression. It is thus important to manage and keep blood glucose levels well-controlled. She concluded by advising people living with diabetes to get vaccinated as soon as possible and to take sensible precautions.

Sebnem Guneyman, diabetes advocate, living with T1D joined the panel discussion which reflected on discussion topics ranging from creative thinking around access to vaccination, recommendations on co-vaccination for flu and COVID-19, to the risk of a twindemic and misconceptions about vaccines. Her key message was, “we already have enough difficulties living with diabetes, so we need to be attentive and vigilant and we need to look after our body and listen to the experts”.

What about respiratory virus infections?