Press release
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PHARMACIES USE NEW TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST VACCINATION THIS WINTER

More than 800 pharmacies have already joined the initiative launched by ANF and Sword, which uses technology developed by the Portuguese unicorn to help answer questions, tackle vaccine hesitancy and facilitate appointment scheduling.

With the Seasonal Vaccination Campaign already underway, the challenge now is to reach people for whom vaccination is recommended and who stand to benefit most from this protection. Community pharmacies are therefore stepping up their outreach and information efforts to increase vaccination coverage, tackle hesitancy and make access to vaccination even simpler and more convenient.

This year, under the partnership between the National Association of Pharmacies (ANF) and Sword, a Portuguese company with an international reputation for its health technology, a solution has been developed to enable participating pharmacies to proactively contact a larger number of people in a personalised way. Using artificial intelligence, Sword's solution helps provide vaccination information and makes it easier to book appointments at participating pharmacies. This approach complements the work of pharmacy teams, strengthening their ability to promote health literacy, answer questions and facilitate access to vaccination.

In the first year of community pharmacies' participation in the Seasonal Vaccination Campaign, in 2023–2024, approximately 70% of all flu vaccines administered nationwide were given in these establishments. By strengthening proactive outreach and making appointments easier to book, this initiative aims to extend that reach even further. According to Sword's projections, using the solution could increase the number of people vaccinated in pharmacies by around 10%, equivalent to protecting up to 100,000 additional people in Portugal.

Despite Portugal's high flu vaccination rates, the latest data point to a decline in uptake, particularly for COVID-19 vaccination, including among especially vulnerable people. This trend is unfolding against a backdrop of growing vaccine hesitancy worldwide, with misinformation continuing to fuel doubts and influence decisions.

"Vaccination is one of the most effective public health interventions, and we know that making it available is not enough: we need to reach people, answer their questions and make access as

straightforward as possible. Pharmacies have a unique close relationship with the population and can play a particularly important role in reaching those who have not yet decided to get vaccinated or who keep putting off that decision. We want to build on this proximity, now reinforced by technology, to reach more people sooner, especially those who stand to benefit most from vaccination before viruses begin circulating more widely," says Ema Paulino, President of ANF.

"Personalised information and ease of booking are key factors in vaccination uptake. They are also areas where technology can make a difference. We know that successful vaccination during this critical period can significantly reduce pressure on the National Health Service (SNS) emergency departments in the coming months. With Sword's technology and this partnership, we are taking a decisive step towards making this year and the years ahead different," says Fernando Correia, physician and Clinical Director at Sword.

Throughout the process, the pharmacy remains each person's main point of reference. The technology facilitates contact, access to information and appointment scheduling, complementing face-to-face channels. Professional advice and individual assessment remain the responsibility of healthcare professionals.

Vaccination in pharmacies: Who is eligible?

The Autumn–Winter 2026–2027 Seasonal Vaccination Campaign against flu and COVID-19 began on 30 September and includes approximately 2,550 participating pharmacies. Located throughout the country and offering extended opening hours, pharmacies provide convenient, accessible vaccination services close to where people live. The campaign runs until 31 March 2027.

Against flu, people aged 60 to 84 and those aged 18 to 59 with an underlying medical condition that puts them at risk can be vaccinated at pharmacies.

Against COVID-19, people aged 70 to 84 and people aged 18 to 69 with an underlying risk condition can be vaccinated. People aged 60 to 69 without underlying risk conditions may also request vaccination following an individual benefit-risk assessment, without the need for prior assessment or a medical declaration.

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