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STATINS' BENEFITS UNDERSTATED AND HARMS EXAGGERATED

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In an effort to counter what they said were misleading reports of high levels of side effects, the scientists said in the Lancet medical journal there was a "serious cost to public health" in such claims, which can dissuade people from taking beneficial medicines. "Our review shows that the numbers of people who avoid heart attacks and strokes by taking statin therapy are very much larger than the numbers who have side effects," said Rory Collins, a professor at the Clinical Trial Service Unit at Britain's Oxford University.

He also said that those who experience side effects-which include muscle pain, nausea and liver problems-could reverse them by stopping the statin, while the effects of a heart attack or stroke "are irreversible and can be devastating".

Biggest generators

Once among the biggest revenue generators for drugmakers such as Pfizer and AstraZeneca, most statins are now off-patent and available as cheap generics. US health guidelines recommend aggressive statin therapy for high-risk patients. In Britain, they are taken by an estimated 7 million people and health authorities have said they should be prescribed more widely as preventatives. Cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks and strokes are the world's number one killers, accounting for an estimated 31 percent of all deaths and claiming 17.5 million lives a year worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. — Reuters

MISTRUST OF VACCINES IS GREATEST IN FRANCE

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN VACCINES VARIES WIDELY

LONDON: Public confidence in immunization varies widely across the world with the French the most skeptical about the safety of vaccines, according to a survey published yesterday.

With outbreaks of measles, whooping cough and other infectious diseases occurring in recent years in places where the take-up of vaccinations has been low, the scientists behind the survey said its insights could help policy-makers tackle such problems.

The study took views from almost 66,000 people across 67 countries about whether they consider vaccines important, safe, effective and compatible with their religious beliefs. France - the birthplace of immunology pioneer Louis Pasteur - was the country least confident of vaccine safety, with 41 percent of those surveyed disagreeing that vaccines are safe, more than three times the global average of 12 percent. Europe had six other countries among the 10 least trusting - Bosnia & Herzegovina, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, Armenia and Slovenia.

Publishing their findings in the journal EBioMedicine, researchers led by Heidi Larson of the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine said negative attitudes may be due to controversies over suspected side-effects and hesitancy among some family doctors. Public trust in immunization is an important global health issue, with lack



NICE: A nurse vaccinates a patient as part of the start of the seasonal influenza vaccination campaign on October 21, 2015. —AFP

of trust leading people to turn down potentially life-saving vaccines.

Vaccine refusal has been linked to outbreaks of diseases such as measles in the United States, Europe, Asia, the Pacific and Africa in recent years, and has also caused serious setbacks to global ambitions to eradicate polio. "It is vital to global public health that we regularly monitor attitudes towards vaccines so we can quickly identify countries or groups with declining confidence," Larson said. "This gives us the best chance of preventing possi-

ble outbreaks of diseases." The survey found southeast Asia was most confident in safety, with fewer than 1 percent in Bangladesh thinking vaccines were not safe. It also found that some countries including France had much greater confidence in the importance of vaccines than in their safety. "This ...shows that vaccine acceptance is precarious," said

Larson, adding that scientists and public health authorities need to "do much better at building public trust". —Reuters

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