

Uptake of COVID vaccination in a diverse cohort of PLWHIV in Melbourne: how can we do better?

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Background:

The Australian Government commenced its COVID-19 vaccination program on February 22nd, 2021. People Living With HIV (PLWHIV) were assigned Phase 1b, commencing March 22nd, 2021. On October 1st, 2021, Victorian Premier Andrews announced all authorised workers would need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to continue working onsite (the vaccine mandate).

Aims:

To examine the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines at our institution, before the vaccine mandate was announced. Demographic factors within the cohort associated with high and low vaccine uptake were analysed to understand risks for vaccination non-adherence.

Methods:

Adult PLWHIV were identified through the Monash Infectious Diseases HIV database. Only PLWHIV engaged with care (at least one clinic visit and/or one HIV viral load taken in both 2019 and 2020) were included. Demographic information was collected from medical records. COVID-19 vaccination status as of 1st October 2021 was collected from AIR (Australian Immunisation Register). For PLWHIV without a COVID-19 vaccine, a chart review was undertaken for a documented discussion with their HIV clinician about COVID-19 vaccination.

Results:

A total of 290 participants were identified as eligible. 55 (19%) PLWHIV had not received a COVID-19 vaccine prior to 1st October. 71% of the unvaccinated group were male and Australian born (47%), compared with 73% of vaccinated group being male and 37% Australian born.

Only 7 unvaccinated people had a documented conversation with their treating clinician regarding their concerns. The most common reason was fear of side effects and a desire to have the vaccine of their choice.

Conclusion:

There was lower uptake of COVID vaccines amongst PLWHIV at our institution compared to the general population. While clinicians may have had conversations with vaccine hesitant PLWHIV, these were poorly documented. This represents a lost opportunity to identify the reasons for vaccine hesitancy amongst PLWHIV and help inform further public health measures.

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