COVID-19 VACCINATION AT A SWEDISH NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM – A MEANS OF FIGHTING THE PANDEMIC

Alsterberg S[1], Öfverström E[1], Quick S[1], Isendahl P[1], Alanko Blomé M[1,2]

[1]Department of Infectious Disease, University Hospital Skåne, Malmö, Sweden
[2]Regional Office for Communicable Disease Control, Malmö, Sweden

Background:
Sweden was affected by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic with regional variations. In Skane region the highest rates of transmission so far were observed in Dec 2020 – Jan 2021. Vaccination against Covid-19 was orderly implemented in the end of December 2020, starting with the elderly. In May 2021 persons with expected difficulties to follow national guidelines were offered vaccination.

Description of model of care/intervention:
The Malmö Needle Exchange Program (MNEP) offers vaccination against hepatitis B since 1994 and hepatitis A since 1999. In 2021 the MNEP had 557 participants, 70 % male, mean age 38,5 years. From mid-May 2021 all participants were offered vaccination with Moderna COVID-19 (mRNA-1273), given according to the schedule as per manufacturer specification, in 2 doses (100 µg, 0.5 ml each) intramuscularly into the deltoid muscle, 4 weeks apart.

Effectiveness:
During the first month 112 first doses were given. A further 13 first doses were given later, corresponding to 125 first doses in total. Thus 20 % of the annual visitors were vaccinated in one month. Subsequently 107 second doses were given. When a third dose was recommended in national guidelines 52 third doses were given from Dec 2021 to March 2022. In total, 284 vaccine doses were given. Approximately 85 % of those having received a first dose came back for the second dose, 49 % of them received a third dose. No adverse reactions were observed. Reasons for not being vaccinated on site were medical/allergic reasons, participants' objections and having received vaccination elsewhere.

Conclusion and next steps:
Persons with ongoing injection drug use may be hard to reach by Covid-19 vaccination programs. They may also be exposed to the virus without means to provide care for themselves or preventing forward transmission due to unstable housing. A needle exchange program can be used to provide vaccination.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:
None