

Covid-19 Vaccine Uptake in People Living with HIV

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Dear Editor,

The vaccine rollout programme for COVID-19 in Ireland began in January 2021. As per both BHIVA and EACS latest guidelines, PLWH should receive one of the recommended vaccinations available against COVID-19. HSE data indicates that vaccine uptake among the general population is high. We aimed to review the various factors influencing vaccine uptake and hesitancy in a subset of patients attending our HIV clinic service.

We retrospectively reviewed 40 medical records of patients attending the HIV outpatient clinic in Beaumont Hospital in April 2021. We collected information including demographic, ethnicity, occupational and previous COVID infection history from all charts reviewed. Data was analysed using STATA software.

In terms of demographics, twenty patients (53%) were male and nineteen (47%) were female. Twenty (50%) identified as Black African, eighteen (45%) as Caucasian and two (5%) as Other. The age range was between 28 and 62 years with mean age being 42 years old. Sixteen (40%) patients reported being unemployed with twenty-four (60%) being employed. This included four (17%) HCWs.

Twenty-two (55%) patients had a documented chronic illness other than HIV. When we looked at HIV infection, the majority of patients were virally suppressed with one patient having a detectable viral load. Thirty-Seven (93%) patients had a CD4 count of >400cells/uL taken within last six months.

Four (10%) patients reported having experienced previous confirmed COVID infection. Of those, forty patients (100%) had either received first dose of vaccine or were awaiting appointment.

Twenty-eight (70%) patients in total were willing to receive or had received 1st dose of available COVID vaccine. Twelve (30%) stated they had declined or would decline a vaccination when it was offered. Of those, seven (58%) had previously declined other vaccinations in our clinic and nine (75%) were unemployed. Seven (58%) patients were Irish and five (42%) were Black African.

Our review demonstrated that vaccine hesitancy is a concern among PLWH attending our clinic. Of those that were unwilling to take an available vaccine, the majority were unemployed, Irish and male. Factors which may impact vaccine hesitancy in these groups include low education level and the influence of social media¹. Increased focus on patient education and alleviating concerns should be prioritised at outpatient clinic settings in order to overcome this barrier to maintaining high vaccination uptake among vulnerable population groups².

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