

Uptake of COVID-19 vaccination among people who inject drugs in Australia

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Introduction and Aims:

People who inject drugs (PWID) may be at elevated risk of adverse outcomes from SARS-CoV2 infection, however data on COVID-19 vaccine uptake among PWID are scarce. This study aimed to determine COVID-19 vaccine uptake among PWID, identify factors associated with sub-optimal uptake, and compare uptake to the general population.

Design and Methods:

The Australian Needle Syringe Program Survey is an annual sentinel surveillance project, comprising a self-completed questionnaire and provision of a dried blood sample for HIV and HCV testing. In 2021, respondents provided information on their COVID-19 vaccination status. Multivariate logistic regression models identified correlates of vaccine uptake.

Results:

Among 1166 respondents, 49% had been vaccinated and in most states and territories, vaccine uptake was significantly lower than among the general population. Independent predictors of vaccine uptake were longer duration of vaccine eligibility (AOR 3.42, 95%CI 2.65,4.41); prior SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic testing (AOR 2.90, 95%CI 2.22,3.79); injection of opioids (AOR 1.91, 95%CI 1.20,3.05) and current opioid agonist therapy (AOR 1.70, 95%CI 1.23,2.33). Women (AOR 0.70, 95%CI 0.54,0.92) and those who reported daily or more frequent injection (AOR 0.75, 95%CI 0.57,1.00) were significantly less likely to be vaccinated.

Discussions and Conclusions:

In most Australian states and territories, uptake of COVID-19 vaccine among PWID lagged uptake among the general population. Increased efforts are required to ensure PWID have equitable access to vaccination. Vaccination programs within harm reduction services and via outreach, coupled with increased support for peers to act as vaccine champions, are likely to reduce barriers and improve COVID-19 vaccine uptake in this population.

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