

FACTORS INFLUENCING COVID-19 VACCINATION ACCEPTABILITY IN THREE CANADIAN FEDERAL PRISONS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

Lessard D^{1,2}, Ortiz-Paredes D¹, Park H¹, Varsaneux O³, Worthington J³, Basta NE⁴, Cox J^{1,4,5}, Lebouché B^{1,2,5,6}, MacDonald SE^{7,8}, Reifferscheid L⁸, Ismail SJ⁹, Kronfli N^{1,4,5}

¹ *Centre for Outcomes Research and Evaluation, Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre*

² *Canadian Institutes of Health Research Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research Mentorship Chair in Innovative Clinical Trial, Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre*

³ *Correctional Service Canada (CSC)*

⁴ *Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health, School of Population and Global Health, McGill University*

⁵ *Department of Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases and Chronic Viral Illness Service, McGill University Health Centre*

⁶ *Department of Family Medicine, McGill University*

⁷ *Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta*

⁸ *School of Public Health, University of Alberta*

⁹ *Division of Immunization Programs and Pandemic Preparedness, Centre for Immunization and Respiratory Infectious Diseases, Public Health Agency of Canada and Metro City Medical Clinic*

Background:

Canadian prisons experienced multiple COVID-19 outbreaks. Consequently, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization prioritized correctional facilities for COVID-19 vaccination. Given historically low vaccine uptake in these settings, we explored factors influencing COVID-19 vaccination acceptability among people incarcerated in federal prisons.

Methods:

Using a qualitative descriptive design, we remotely conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample (gender, age, and ethnicity) of incarcerated persons from three sites in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, chosen based on outbreak status and historical influenza vaccine uptake. We inductively and thematically analyzed audio-recorded transcripts.

Results:

From March 22-29, 2021, 15 participants (n=5 per site; n=5 women; median age=43 years) were interviewed, including five Indigenous people and five from other minority groups. We defined four themes regarding vaccine acceptability: 1) *Trusting relationships with health care providers*: participants identified knowledgeable, non-judgmental, supportive, and pro-active providers as facilitators to vaccine acceptability; 2) *Perceived greater COVID-19 vulnerability in prisons*: participants identified perceived COVID-19 severity and heightened prison-specific risk of transmission, challenges in implementing infection prevention and control measures, and accessing psychosocial support (e.g., family visits), as facilitators to vaccine acceptability; 3) *Poor COVID-19 vaccine literacy*: participants identified existing vaccine information as minimal, incomplete or inadequate, fueling beliefs in conspiracies to harm incarcerated people, as barriers to vaccine acceptability; and 4) *Perceived individual and collective benefits of COVID-19 vaccination outweigh perceived risks*: participants identified vaccine-related benefits, including preventing severe COVID-19, ending lockdown measures, and re-accessing privileges, exceeded risks such as side effects, need for second doses, and inequities in vaccine distribution, as facilitators to vaccine acceptability.

Conclusion:

Our results highlight the importance of providing accurate information and establishing trust when offering health services, such as COVID-19 vaccination, to people in correctional settings. Tailored

information sessions, provided by knowledgeable health care providers, may increase vaccine uptake and improve provider-inmate relationships.

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