

**Lack of knowledge of hepatitis B vaccine the main reason for poor vaccine uptake among
healthcare workers caring for the South African elderly**
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Introduction:

A 3-dose hepatitis B vaccine (HepB) series is recommended for healthcare workers (HCWs) who continue to be at risk of nosocomial hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection due to poor vaccination rates. Data on reasons for HepB decision-making amongst HCWs caring for the elderly are limited. Consequently, a need to investigate and provide future guidance.

Objectives:

To investigate HepB uptake and reasons for vaccination decision-making amongst HCWs caring for the South African elderly.

Method:

Descriptive study using a self-administered structured questionnaire, conducted among 360 HCWs present on the day of data collection at 18 community health centres and 44 public and private sector old age homes. Data were captured using Microsoft Excel[®] and imported to Epi Info[™] 7 for descriptive statistical analysis. Ethics approval to conduct the study was obtained. All participants provided informed consent.

Results:

The response rate was 76.7% (276/360). Only 29.7% (82/276) were fully vaccinated while 70.3% (194/276) of the respondents were not vaccinated at all against HBV. The main reason for accepting HepB (90.2% [74/82]) was to protect themselves. For those who did not receive HepB, the main reason was lack of knowledge about HepB (63.4% [123/194]), while 35.1% (68/194) reported HepB stock-outs at their facilities.

Conclusions

HepB uptake by HCWs caring for the elderly was sub-optimal. Lack of knowledge about HepB and the non-availability of the vaccine were the main reasons for non-vaccination. Training for HCWs should underscore the importance, safety, effectiveness and acceptance of HepB.

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