

Public attitudes toward pediatrics routine immunization during COVID-19 pandemic across Saudi society, 2020

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Background

As known that routine vaccines are very essential and crucial for children's wellbeing, with the COVID-19 situation, some restrictions were applied to Saudi society, and the parents became concerned about visiting the health care facilities resulting in noncompliance.

Methods

In this cross-sectional study, 1704 caregivers participated and they were randomly selected from the 13 regions of Saudi Arabia. We used an implemented questionnaire distributed in Arabic language. 1360 participants were included. A formulated data collection sheet was formed based on parent demographics, child data, the decision regarding the vaccines, causes-related questions, source of information, the way they prefer to receive the vaccines for both groups whom children received the vaccines, and who did not during COVID19 pandemics.

Discussion

Routine childhood immunizations are important preventive measures against communicable serious infections. Saudi MOH is working hard with such preventive measures using the time table of routine childhood vaccines and the campaign that either cover the same organisms or other organisms based on the population requirements. Reference 3, reference 5 In this study despite COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown orders, 59.5% of the participants who had kids with due vaccines gave their kids the vaccine. A previous study conducted in 2018 at the National Guard Comprehensive Specialized Clinic in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, targeting children aged between 2- months and 6-years-old with delayed vaccination who attended the Well Baby Clinic of the Institute showed that out of the 1000 children, 776 (77.6%) presented in time for vaccination. Reference 1. Another study was conducted between May 2016 and August 2017 in 5 primary health care centers and 2 tertiary government hospitals in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia showed that delayed vaccinations were observed in (85\351; 24.2%) of the sample studied. Reference 2 A third study conducted at King Abdul-Aziz University Hospital, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia between September 2000 and February 2001 included 227 parents of children with ages ranging between 2-52 months showed that in most infants (91%), the primary vaccinations were given on time. Reference 4. The rate of compliance was lower in our study (60.5% of those with scheduled vaccines) and the main cause for the delay was the fear of COVID-19 infection (77.4%). The fear was existing even in the parents of the kids who did not have scheduled vaccines (19.2%) but there was a significant statistical difference between the incidence of fear between the two groups (P-value < 0.0001). The availability of home immunization visits was the most common choice (n=201, 61.5%) for changing the attitude toward vaccination in this group which again proves that the safety of their kids while COVID-19 infection is spreading is their main concern and their good attitude toward routine immunizations. The main sources of information that were the references to those who gave their kids the due vaccines were the health workers, such as pediatricians or family physicians (n=176, 35.4%), and by using the ministry of health application "Sehha" and calling the hotline 937 (n=142, 29.3%). We think that people should have more awareness about the mentioned Saudi MOH services to utilize them especially in the time they can not reach the health care workers directly to answer their inquiries.

Objectives

To examine the attitude and limitations that influenced the parents' decision toward their children vaccination during COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

1360 participants were included. The were college-educated. The results highlighted that 327 (39.5%) participants chose not to give the vaccine to their children despite that they were due for and their main reasons were fear from COVID-19 infection and being unable to reach the health care services. We found that there was no statistical difference in the compliance between the overall compliance and the 13 areas of Saudi Arabia compliance with exception of 2 areas as Madina showed lower compliance (32% with P-value 0.0104). The main sources of information that encouraged giving the vaccines in 501 participants were the physicians (35.1%) and the Saudi MOH services 937 and SEHA application (29.3%). The majority of the participants chose home immunization visits as the preferred way of vaccination during COVID-19 pandemic (46.8%). Lastly, our study shows that around 59 % of the respondents believed that routine childhood immunization vaccines have no rule in spreading the COVID-19 virus and the same percentage believe that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, routine childhood vaccines have to be given on time, which indicates a good level of awareness in Saudi society.

Conclusions

The present study indicated the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the compliance of Saudi society toward pediatrics routine immunization with an overall good level of knowledge about the relationship between the routine vaccines and the spread of COVID-19 infection and the importance of getting the scheduled childhood immunizations on time in spite of the COVID-19 widespread.

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