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BACKGROUND

COVID-19 vaccines are critical to the pandemic response. Vaccine hesitancy has been named by the World Health Organization as one of the top 10 threats to global health¹ and has been described as “the next challenge in the fight against COVID-19”.² As such, understanding reasonings behind vaccine hesitancy is of great importance.

Despite the rarity of allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccines³⁻¹⁰, people with allergies may still hold reservations. We aimed to describe the perceptions of COVID-19 vaccines amongst individuals managing allergy.

METHODS

Semi-structured qualitative interviews regarding COVID-19 vaccines were conducted virtually, with two groups of participants:

- (1) parents of children with physician-diagnosed allergies, who were eligible for vaccination,
- (2) adults with physician-diagnosed allergies, who were eligible for vaccination.

Participants were recruited via social media, as well as physical posters in allergy clinics Canada-wide. Transcripts were made verbatim and were subsequently analysed thematically independently by two researchers (KM, AB).

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Eight interviews have been conducted (n = 5 parents of children with allergies; n = 3 adults with allergies).



All participants (and eligible children of participants) have been vaccinated against COVID-19, with a range of allergies, including food and drug allergies.

FOUR MAJOR THEMES AND SUPPORTING QUOTES

THEME 1: Benefits of vaccination outweigh risks

Most participants (88%) agreed that despite possible allergic reaction, the benefits of vaccination (i.e. protection against COVID-19, moral duty, etc.) outweighed the risk of possible allergic reactions and other side effects of the vaccine

“I was uncomfortable because I could not quantify the risk, but I did make a judgement that the benefits outweighed the risk, it was a bit of a hope for the best” – Participant 3

THEME 2: Allergy community increases vaccine confidence

Participants who were part of online-based allergy support groups discussed the value of support of individuals with similar experiences throughout the vaccination process

“They [community members] were talking to me during the appointment, because, again, anxiety was kicking in and they are like ‘no don't worry’ ... they really pushed all of us to get the vaccine” – Participant 8

THEME 3: Lack of accessible information delayed vaccination

Some participants had difficulty finding necessary information to feel comfortable with vaccination, causing delays in vaccination

“I waited an extra month [to vaccinate], because I had no idea or research – in the ads about ‘oh hey this is allergy friendly’” – Participant 8

THEME 5: Allergists' advice enhanced vaccine confidence

Participants with allergists familiar with patients' allergic disease history created a sense of comfort with being vaccinated, whereas those without access to an allergist found vaccination more stressful

“I'm comfortable with that [vaccination]. We talked to her allergist, and we talked to our family doctor. Her allergist was like, ‘there's no concern with food allergies and this vaccine’, so she's OK” – Participant 4

CONCLUSION

Despite evidence of the safety of COVID-19 vaccines for those with allergies, vaccine confidence was initially shaken due to gaps in resources, professional medical advice, and misinformation online.

Ultimately, the decision to be vaccinated often was influenced by diverse stakeholders, including medical professionals, scientists, and governmental organizations, as well as community groups. Knowledge translation efforts should address the identified gaps to reduce the spread of misinformation.

Scan for references



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