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Attitudes and barriers toward COVID-19 vaccination among people experiencing homelessness in Detroit, MI

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Attitudes and barriers toward COVID-19 vaccination among people experiencing homelessness in Detroit, MI

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Introduction: People experiencing homelessness (PEH) have a high risk of exposure to communicable diseases and limited access to health care services and treatment in their communities. Despite the availability of highly effective vaccines against COVID-19, the infection prevention practices and level of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among PEH in Detroit have not been well studied.

Methods: Medical students administered an electronic Qualtrics survey to consented participants during outreach visits to local homeless shelters and encampments organized by Street Medicine Detroit. The questionnaire comprised six topics, including hygiene and masking practices, experience with COVID-19 testing and vaccination, and attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccination. Data collection remains in progress and is expected to be completed in March 2022.

Results: Of the 40 current respondents, approximately half reported being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (52.5\%, n=21). The majority wear a face mask around others at least half the time (75\%, n=30). Logistical barriers (e.g., inadequate transportation to vaccination sites) were uncommon (5\%, n=2). Many participants expressed concerns about potential serious adverse effects of the COVID-19 vaccine (73.1\%, n=19) and the trustworthiness of vaccine-related information from government agencies like the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (50\%, n=20).

Conclusions: Misconceptions about vaccine safety and distrust of government agencies represent significant barriers to widespread vaccination against COVID-19 among PEH. These data can be used to inform the development of targeted medical and outreach interventions that address barriers to COVID-19 containment and vaccination within homeless populations in urban settings.