

Health literacy as a barrier to vaccine accessibility in people suffering from allergic diseases.

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Introduction

The National COVID-19 Vaccination Program proves to pose a significant challenge to Health literacy (HL) skills of the Polish population. Currently, each patient willing to be vaccinated is obliged to fill out a qualification form, comprising several questions, including 2 allergy-oriented queries about sensitivity to polyethylene glycol and history of anaphylaxis.

Aim

To assess HL and potential allergic contraindications to COVID-19 vaccines in Polish population.

Material and methods

A thousand patients were recruited in a vaccination point. The qualification was handled by an allergist, which allowed for reviewing the patients' allergy status without postponing the vaccination in case of doubts arising from answers on the form. Volunteers were asked to provide basic medical history and fill out HLS-EU-Q16 – a validated European HL questionnaire. All data were then merged, recorded anonymously and statistically analyzed.

Results

A hundred and seventy-three (17.3%) patients declared having experienced anaphylaxis on the vaccination form. All were eventually qualified to receive COVID-19 vaccine by an allergist and none experienced any severe adverse events. Of those patients, only 9 (5.2%) had confirmed history of anaphylaxis. Statistical analysis revealed that patients with poor HLS-EU-Q16 score were significantly more likely to provide wrong answers on the vaccination form and potentially get disqualified, compared to patients with good HL. The most common cause was misinterpretation of the question based on history of non-severe allergic disease.

Conclusions

Health literacy can pose a great barrier in effective access to vaccinations. More legible qualification questionnaires, as well as better training of qualifying physicians is required to minimize avoidable disqualifications of patients willing to get vaccinated.

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