

VAC_11 - A significant portion of undergraduate health science students are not immunized as they should

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Introduction: Health care workers (HCWs) are more at risk of exposure to and of possible transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases. Hence, the early assessment of their vaccination status, ideally during undergraduate years, is of utmost importance.

Objective: To evaluate the vaccination coverage and knowledge about vaccines, associated infectious diseases and behavior regarding protection among health science undergraduate students.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted from August 2018 to May 2021. A total of 767 students from the two first years of all health science courses of Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), answered a self-administered form with questions regarding vaccines and related diseases. Vaccination records were also checked for: tetanus and diphtheria (Td), measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), hepatitis B, influenza, hepatitis A, varicella and meningococcal vaccines.

Results: Only 24.9% of students informed that their vaccination record had been previously requested and 63.8% reported having been advised at some point about the need for vaccination, with a difference between courses ($p < 0.001$). Vaccines that should be updated for HCWs were known by only 28.4%, without difference among courses. The frequency of knowledge of hepatitis B, MMR, Td and influenza vaccination schedules was only 6.4%. A higher rate of flu vaccine coverage among students who are aware of the annual revaccination scheme was observed ($p < 0.001$). It is a matter of concern that only 4.2% students had completed the vaccination schedule recommended for HCWs, although 40.1% had the misperception of being updated. When considering only vaccines offered free of charge by SUS, the rate of updated vaccination schedules rose to 23.9%, without difference among courses. All vaccines had a coverage rate below the target indicated by SUS.

Conclusion: The study showed an overall low vaccination coverage among health science students along with a poor perception about vaccination schedules. These results are worrisome, considering that these future HCWs will guide the population in the use of vaccines. To overcome this, the study of vaccines and related diseases should be envisaged and deepened as part of the health science courses curricula.

Keywords: Vaccination coverage; Undergraduate students; Health science