

Increasing Hepatitis B vaccination in homeless populations

What you need to know

Hepatitis virus is very common for those who are experiencing homelessness. Hepatitis B can be prevented through vaccination. A program that included education, tracking, a small financial incentive and case management had the best chance of completing the vaccine.



Photo: zeathiel

What is this research about?

Those who are homeless have a higher chance of getting hepatitis B virus (HBV). Throughout the United States there is an average of 2.9 out of 100,000 cases of HBV. A study made up of those who are homeless and have a mental illness or use substances found 32.5% tested positive for HBV.

Hepatitis B can be prevented through a course of 3 doses of a vaccine. These must be administered at intervals within a 6 month period. The period and number of doses makes it difficult to complete successfully for those experiencing homelessness.

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www.homelesshub.ca
for more information

KEYWORDS

Homelessness, Hepatitis, Vaccination, Case Management, Prevention

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ARTICLE SOURCE

Stein, J. A., & Nyamathi, A. M. (2010). Completion and subject loss within an intensive hepatitis vaccination intervention among homeless adults: The role of risk factors, demographics, and psychosocial variables. *Health Psychology, 29*(3), 317.

What did the researchers do?

Participants were aged between 18-65 and were homeless at least within the past 30 days. Of the initial group of 2036 people chosen for the study 40% were HBV positive. Therefore they were unable to participate. The final sample was made up of 865 HBV negative participants, 20% had hepatitis C. The study was completed in the 'skid row' area of Los Angeles.

Participants were assigned to one of three groups which offered different

amounts of case management and tracking. All of those in the study were provided with education on hepatitis as well as HIV.

The study consisted of a blood test, and follow up, as well as interviews that were administered in a private location. Researchers used the interviews to look at other factors that influence the rate of completing the 3 doses for the most intensive group.

What did the researchers find?

In the most intensive group, 68% of the participants completed the vaccination. This group consisted of 7 case management sessions with a nurse as well as tracking and incentives.

In the second group 61% completed the process. The middle group consisted of tracking and an incentive for participation but no case management.

In the least intensive group, only 54% completed the vaccination process. This intervention only provided incentives without the tracking or case management.

In addition to these general trends, there were specific variables that were noted in the most intensive group. Reporting of poorer health was linked with completing the vaccine. A lack of social support was linked with not finishing it. Those who identified as African Americans in the study were more likely to complete the vaccine. Those who identified as white were less likely to complete the vaccine. Women were also more likely to complete the study as were those with higher levels of education.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Given the high rate of HBV in Canada there is a need for additional programming. A case management centred program was most effective. Policy makers should consider providing additional funding into vaccination against HBV.

Service providers should work to reduce barriers that prevent return visits. Offering vaccines in an easy to access location may make it easier to return.

Additional research should replicate this study in different cities. Expanding on this will provide greater insight into preventing hepatitis B in a variety of urban and rural areas.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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The Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) Unit at York University to produce Research Summaries on the topic of Youth Homelessness in Canada. CHRN focuses on education, networking and knowledge mobilization in order to move towards effective long-term solutions to homelessness.