

LOW PREVALENCE OF SARS-COV-2 INFECTIONS AND ANTIBODIES AMONG CLIENTS AND STAFF MEMBERS OF HOMELESS SERVICES IN AMSTERDAM FOLLOWING THE SECOND WAVE OF INFECTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS: DID THE DUTCH POLICY WORK?

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Background People experiencing homelessness (PEH) seem more susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection and a severe course of COVID-19. In the Netherlands, there were no major outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 among PEH. The Dutch government setup emergency shelters and preventive measures were introduced in the homeless services. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of this shelter policy by conducting an on-site COVID-19 screening project among PEH and staff at homelessness services in Amsterdam.

Methods We assessed the proportion of clients and staff members of two homelessness services with positive SARS-CoV-2 PCR and antibody results (IgG/IgM Rapid Test) in May 2021, shortly after the second wave of infections. We also assessed their socio-demographic, clinical and lifestyle characteristics, compliance with basic prevention measures and intention to vaccinate against COVID-19.

Results A total of 138 clients and 53 staff members, unsuspected of COVID-19, were tested and filled out a questionnaire. Among PEH, the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection was 0% (0/133;95%CI=0-1.9) and of SARS-CoV-2 antibody positivity 1.6% (2/131;95%CI=0.8-7.5). Among staff, these figures were 3% (1/32;95%CI=0.1-16.2) and 11% (5/53;95%CI=3.6-23.6). The majority of participants was frequently compliant with the basic preventive measures 'not shaking hands', 'wearing a face mask' and 'washing hands', but not with 'physical distancing'. Overall, intention to vaccinate for COVID-19 was low (30% for clients, 10% for staff) or medium (28% for clients, 35% for staff). The majority of participants reported their confidence in the COVID-19 policy to be low (27% for clients, 17% for staff) or neutral (32% for clients, 53% for staff).

Conclusion Potential explanations for the low prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infections and antibodies among PEH may be the shelter policy and their compliance with prevention measures. The vaccine hesitancy and low governmental trust is alarming for vaccination uptake, suggesting to improve public health communication towards clients and staff of homeless services.

Disclosure of Interest

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