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Barriers to Complete Adult Vaccinations in Vermont

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Introduction/Background

- Child immunization is nearly universally accepted as an effective preventative measure against infectious diseases, yet adult immunization rates continue to lag behind recommended levels.
- Epidemiological trends suggest a correlation between vaccine administration and decreased rates of significant morbidity and mortality, hospitalization and emergency department visits, work absenteeism, and illness associated expenses.
- As of 2010, Vermont is failing to meet its adult immunization goals by 13.4%.
- This study aims to understand and identify specific barriers to adult immunization in Vermont.

Methods

- The survey group was health care practitioners involved in adult vaccination, so a public database of licensed physicians from the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) website was compared against email addresses provided by the VDH of family medicine and internal medicine doctors (qualifying physicians) with Vermont mailing addresses.
- Five hundred and seventy-two emails were sent to the survey group; 15.4% responded to the survey.
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Results

- A total of 88 people responded to the survey, giving us a response of 15.4%.
- Forty-four (50%) identified their specialty as internal medicine, 36 (40.5%) as family medicine, and one (1.1%) as pediatrics. An additional 7 (8.3%) identified other specialties.
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References


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What strategies from outside agencies might be useful to improve immunization rates?

What strategies within your practice might improve immunization rates?

Limitations

- This was an email survey, so the calculated response rate was likely lower than the actual response rate because nearly 100 emails were returned.
- The databases used did not distinguish between physicians currently in practice or those retired.
- Most responders indicated that they preferred electronic methods of communications and reminders to remain up to date on vaccinations, an inherent bias due to the method of correspondence.

Discussion

- Most responders are familiar with and agree with CDC guidelines for adult vaccinations. There were no significant differences in physician behaviors regarding recommendations based on specialty, as family medicine and internal medicine physicians had similar responses.
- The majority of respondents reported adhering to CDC recommendations. A notable exception was in recommending the TDaP immunization to health care workers (47.7%). Considering the actual TDaP Vermont vaccination rates for health care workers as of 2009 are low, lack of physician recommendations may be contributing to lower than desired vaccination rates for this population.
- With regards to practice-oriented barriers, those surveyed noted a lack of a reminder system. The increased utilization of electronic medical records (EMR) may provide a vehicle for a reminder system, as well as incorporating a state immunization registry.
- The primary patient-related barrier was lack of patient-perceived need, which indicates that efforts towards education regarding benefits of vaccination might be fruitful in increasing vaccination rates.
- There appears to be no problem with access to information regarding vaccination guidelines, and rather, specific barriers seem to play significant roles in impeding complete adult immunization.