

HIV & COVID-19

The Philippine Experience



Importance of Vaccination Among People Living With HIV

- COVID-19 vaccines are safe for persons living with HIV (PLHIV), and will not interfere with HIV-related treatment effectiveness.
- The benefits of vaccination outweigh any potential harms, and are especially warranted for PLHIV who are at greater risk of experiencing severe symptoms if infected with COVID-19.
- Patient-provider communication is integral to reassure patients about the effectiveness of vaccines.

PLHIV AT 30% GREATER RISK

There is a 30% greater risk in PLHIVs for developing severe or fatal COVID-19 symptoms, compared to the general population.

VACCINES OFFER PROTECTION

COVID-19 vaccines are safe for PLHIVs. There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines interfere with HIV medication or treatment.

WHO IS NEXT IN LINE?:

Considerations and Guidelines in Vaccinating the PLHIV Community

The global rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine has prompted concerns about its efficacy and safety for the PLHIV community. In the third installment of the HIV & COVID-19 Webinar Series entitled "Who is Next in Line?: Considerations and Guidelines in Vaccinating the PLHIV Community", experts from the field weighed in on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of vaccines on the PLHIV community.

DOST Expert Vaccine Panel on COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials Chairperson Dr. Nina Gloriani discussed the intricacies of how vaccines operate against the virus, emphasizing the preclinical procedures that determine the vaccines' safety, immunogenicity, and efficacy. PLHIV who have impaired immune system are at higher risk for severe COVID-19; vaccination for PLHIV is highly warranted. Due to the fact that the existing COVID-19 vaccines are not live virus vaccines, the risk of safety concerns for the PLHIV community are diminished. Furthermore, the effectiveness of HIV-related treatment or care will not be disrupted by the COVID-19 vaccination.

Continuing the conversation towards holistic care in HIV, Dr. Angelo Juan Ramos elaborated on the experiences of PLHIV during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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People living with HIV may produce weaker immune responses against vaccines in general, but any amount of protection afforded by the COVID-19 vaccine could provide potential benefits far outweighing any risks.

Dr. Nina Gloriani

Chairperson, DOST Expert Vaccine Panel on COVID-19 Vaccine Clinical Trials



A 30% greater risk for severe COVID-19 symptoms looms for people living with HIV because of the possible underlying conditions, such as diabetes or hypertension, warranting the recommendation to undergo COVID-19 vaccination. Reassurance from health care practitioners plays a vital role in this process because the patients' preconceived notions of health concerns might account for their aversion to getting vaccinated. However, despite the plausibility of undesirable consequences, these are still outweighed by the benefits of vaccination.

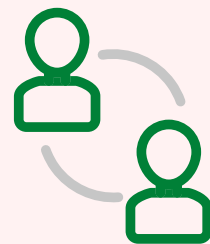
Using the "Swiss Cheese Model" of pandemic defense, vaccines are considered just one layer of intervention, among many, that would help curb the virus. **Patient-provider communication** is highlighted to convey not only the safety basics for COVID-19 but also the reminders of an individual's responsibility to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

Vaccine access, however, entails numerous challenges for which strategies have been devised. **Ms. Amara Quesada**, in her talk about human rights in the context of RA 11166 or the Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act of 2018, expounded on such issues. For one, a **patient's privacy and confidentiality can be ensured** by providing COVID vaccination at HIV treatment hubs and by not requiring disclosure or segregation, which can also help reduce stigma and discrimination against patients. Information and awareness dissemination sits at the heart of these measures to prevent disinformation and guarantee the consistency of care provision. An in-depth discussion of RA 11166 delved into the provisions that protect the confidentiality of a person living with HIV, safeguarding them against discrimination. This includes the availability of health services, of which vaccination is one form, and thus cannot be denied to patients on the basis of their HIV status. The campaign for widespread vaccination continues, and part of the fight is ensuring its accessibility to the PLHIV community.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE VACCINATION AMONG PLHIV

Collaborate with PLHIV Community

- *Work with LGUs, private sector, and HIV-focused community-based organizations to identify PLHIV needs and resources.*
- *Include PLHIVs as a priority population.*



Combat Disinformation



- *Provide correct vaccine information through proper and accessible channels.*
- *Acknowledge reasons for vaccine hesitancy, and provide importance and assurance of vaccine safety.*

Address Stigma and Discrimination

- *Remove signages and areas that segregate based on HIV status.*



Ensure Privacy and Confidentiality



- *Make HIV treatment hubs COVID vaccination sites.*
- *Do not require disclosure of HIV status.*

Provide Accessible Services

- *Make HIV-related services accessible and affordable or free.*
- *Provide holistic care.*
- *Encourage practice of preventive measures and personal precautions.*

