

Acceptance of and Concerns About COVID-19 Vaccination: An Online Survey among Israel Defense Forces Soldiers

ABSTRACT

Large-scale administration of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is imperative for changing the trajectory of the pandemic. Public acceptance of a vaccine is a key determinant of our ability to reach the herd immunity threshold. An anonymous, web-based survey was administered to soldiers in an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) special forces unit. Of 318 respondents, 199 (62.6%) responded "Yes", 72 (22.6%) responded "No" and 47 (14.8%) responded "Unsure" to the question of whether they intend to receive the vaccine. Combat service was found to have a significant correlation with the above responses. Reasons for concern centered around the safety profile of the vaccine. Advocacy measures aiming to dispel misinformation and better inform the military population along with the general public are crucial for attaining maximum acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines.

During December of 2020, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted an emergency use authorization (EUA) to two mRNA-based coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccines [1]. On December 19th, Israel began its nationwide deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, soon to achieve an unprecedented pace – highlighted by the administration of the first vaccine dose to over 10% of the population by December 31st, 2020 [2]. With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to cause substantial morbidity and the disruption of societies and economies, large-scale administration and acceptance of a safe and effective vaccine is currently perceived as the foremost measure for changing the pandemic's trajectory [3].

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) began vaccinating its soldiers for COVID-19 on December 28th, 2020. In order to gauge the acceptance of COVID-19 vaccinations, estimate vaccine allotment and identify potential concerns amongst soldiers, an anonymous, web-based survey was administered to soldiers serving in an IDF special forces unit. The survey was limited to four questions regarding service type (mandatory or permanent), platoon, intention to be vaccinated (yes, no or unsure), and main concern regarding the vaccine.

Between December 19th and 31st, 2020, a total of 318 responses were recorded: 272 (85.5%) by mandatory-service soldiers (aged 18 to 21) and 46 (14.5%) by permanent-service soldiers (aged > 21), while 192 (60.4%) soldiers were from combat platoons and 126 (39.5%) from non-combat platoons (Table 1). When asked whether they intend to receive the approved COVID-19 vaccine if administered within the unit, 199 (62.6%) responded "Yes", 72 (22.6%) responded "No" and 47 (14.8%) were "Unsure" (Figure 1). An independent chi-squared test indicated a significant correlation between combat service and intent to receive the vaccine (chi-squared=18.61, $p<0.001$). Soldiers who responded that they are unsure or do

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