

# Acceptance Of Covid 19 Vaccine In Iraqi Cancer Patients: Hope, Hype And Reality

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** the afflictions of Covid -19 are considered the highest in older age group, patients with chronic diseases and mainly Cancer patients. This made them primary candidates of getting the Covid vaccine.

**Methods:** we assessed in this survey the level of awareness among cancer patients treated in oncology hospitals in Baghdad, rate of Covid-19 infection and their main and trusted source of information about the vaccination updates.

**Results:** forty one percent of patients diagnosed with cancer in this survey already got Covid-19 infection during treatment. The figures of patients with malignancies whom didn't get the vaccine are still low, about one- third of the sample examined. Announcements made by the Iraqi ministry of health are followed by the lowest rate of patients. Conversely, social media websites made the highest impact on patients decision to get the vaccine.

**Conclusion:** the pandemic is seriously impacting the quality of life and the continuity of treatment for cancer patients. Awareness programs are mandatory to update the patients with cancer about the vaccination risks against benefits. Oncologist should discuss with patients any information, studies and trial updates about the vaccine and address their concerns frequently.

**Keyword:** cancer, pandemic, Covid -19 vaccine

## Introduction

Cancer patients are considered among the main risk population whom should get the vaccine for Covid-19 (1). Recommendations from International health organizations confirms the approval and higher benefits against risk in this population especially the geriatric subgroup. However, there were some debate in articles about patients diagnosed with hematological malignancies, risks of vaccine's side

effects and fears from patients from getting a consequent infections or life threatening complications from the vaccine. Some studies revealed that many patients with progressing cancer might be at higher level of complications than those on remission (2). In this article we will address cancer patients acceptance rate of covid -19 vaccine, their source of information and whether or not they got the Covid-19 infection during different cancer treatments.

## Materials and Methods

Researchers in this article organized a questionnaire survey for patients in Oncology hospitals in Baghdad. Cancer patients diagnosed with different malignancies were asked about their opinion of getting the vaccine, previous Covid -19 infection and their trusted source of information they follow about the vaccine updates.

## Results

140 patients diagnosed with cancer participated and confidentiality information were preserved in the survey. Median age of participants was 52 years, range (19-86) years. 57% females and 43% males. Different sources of information were put in the questionnaire and the rate of patients following these sources like: Iraqi Ministry Of health information website 11%, Television 27%, Oncologists or family physicians 22% and 49% of patients follow the social media websites. 58 patients (41%) were previously diagnosed with COVID -19 during their treatment. Surprisingly, 33% of patients still not vaccinated and refused or afraid from getting the vaccine.

## Discussion

The immune system of cancer patients is well known to be compromised due to the disease itself or the therapeutics used. Covid – 19 symptoms might be different and difficult to be diagnosed in cancer patients especially the older population due to

disrupted levels of interleukins by aging process or the cancer cells (3).

The high rates of Covid -19 infections among the patients during treatment will compromise their health and cause unnecessary treatment delays and might afflict the treatment plan and the practice of oncologists (4). The main source of information about vaccine updates were the social media websites. By contrast, publications made by the ministry of health are followed by the lowest figures of patients. One third of the patients were reluctant to get the vaccine and that might be explained by the lack of information on the safety and efficacy of the vaccine in cancer patients.

### Conclusion and recommendations

Broadcasts about the studies and updates on the vaccine should be introduced more through social media websites like Facebook, Twitter and others. Doctors need to discuss thoroughly the risk against benefits of the vaccine in cancer patients and arrange a local guidelines according to the current Covid situation in the country. Still the infection rates among cancer patients considered high in this study. Hence, infection control protocols need to be followed strictly in all hospitals and cancer patients careers should be encouraged more to get the vaccine or frequently tested for Covid-19 to prevent the disease transmission.

### All authors declare no conflict of interests

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