INTEGRATING COVID-19 VACCINATION INTO THE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE NETWORK IN LEBANON

SHORT VERSION

K2P COVID-19 SERIES

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF COVID-19 VACCINATION INTO PHC

Proper integration of COVID-19 vaccination into PHC necessitates both the proper use of the available resources as well as the advent of additional ones. Highlights of the requirements needed for the integration of COVID-19 vaccination into PHC is summarized below.

Physical Environment and Infrastructure

- Proximity to population centers and mass transit to secure high vaccine access and in remote peripheral areas to secure equitable access.
- Dedicated areas for screening, registration, waiting, vaccine storage, preparation, and administration, observation, emergency care, waste disposal, and other clinical services
- Available entry and exit points, including a one-way clinic flow
- Parking facility with easy access to individuals with mobility problems
- Adequate heating and cooling, lighting, handwashing facilities, water and electricity supply, telephone, computer networks, and internet
- Availability of plastic barriers, visual reminders, and cues in place

Supplies

- Adequate availability of medical equipment and other supplies such as PPE, emergency medical kits, thermometers, stethoscopes, and sanitation supplies
- Key documents for clinic function, including vaccine information sheet, immunization record, incident report, and adverse event following immunization form

Cold chain management

- Refrigerators (2°C - 8°C) with freezer compartments (-20°C or -70°C depending on type of vaccine procured and local needs) and opaque containers to store vaccine syringes, with the ability for temperature monitoring

Workforce Requirements

- Establishment of a staffing plan and identifying functional roles and responsibilities, with scalable plans based on the expected number of people to be vaccinated

Training

PHC centers staff must have appropriate training and qualifications in topics including:

- COVID-19 vaccine storage, handling, preparation, and administration
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation and basic life support
- Vaccination documentation
- Infection control practices
- COVID-19 vaccines related topics

Policies, Procedures, Protocols, and Pathways

Regulations should be available to guide the following areas of practice:

- Receipt, storage and handling, and safe disposal of vaccines
- Response to temperature breaches and vaccine expiry
- Screening and referral of patients who display symptoms of COVID-19 or who develop serious adverse reactions
- Screening process for vaccine contraindications and for receipt of previous doses of COVID-19 vaccines or other vaccines
- Safety protocols such as management of anaphylaxis, infection prevention and control, physical distancing, incident reporting, needle stick injuries, and reporting of vaccination errors
- Documentation of the vaccination process and adverse events occurrence
- Post-vaccination patient education including information about adverse events and scheduling a second vaccination appointment

Technology and Record Keeping

- IT support for recording and documenting vaccine stock, registration, scheduling, screening for eligibility, side effects, and providing vaccine information
- Connectivity for data integration into the national booking and vaccination record system (link the existent health information system to the national registration platform to allow registration and follow up of vaccinated individuals)
- Ensure the proper integration of the IMPACT COVID-19 vaccination platform with the existing vaccination registries (Phenics and MERA) to accommodate the registration of COVID-19 vaccination and adverse events following immunization (AEFI) reporting

Waste disposal

- Facilities for waste disposal, including sharps and unused vaccines

Financing

- Support PHC centers with operational cost incurred due to vaccine delivery and increased needs for staffing, trainings, supplies, and extended working hours

Public information and communication

- Communicating consistently, transparently, empathetically and proactively about uncertainty, risks and vaccine availability will contribute to building trust

Community Engagement

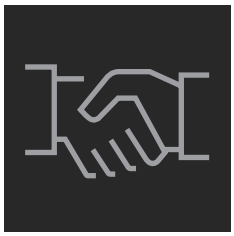
- Harnessing social influences especially from people who are particularly trusted by and identified with members of relevant communities

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Extrapolating from the experience with other vaccines and from COVID-19 vaccine rollout in hospitals in Lebanon, challenges related to vaccine delivery, infrastructure, equipment, information technology, health professionals' knowledge and practice, and public attitude are anticipated while evidence-based counterstrategies have been identified.

MOVING FORWARD

Focusing on primary health care as a foundation of response and recovery will help minimize discrepancies in vaccine access and therefore mitigate some of the inequalities arising from COVID-19. Despite years of underinvestment, the unparalleled experience in the delivery of routine immunisations places primary care in a strong position to respond to the prompt needs of COVID-19 vaccination. Support and enablement remain vital for the integration of COVID-19 vaccination into PHC. This can be realized through:



LEGISLATORS

- Select PHC centers for piloting COVID-19 vaccines deployment, taking into account the available resources and equity of distribution, with step-wise increase in deployment sites based on need
- Negotiate with COVAX and pharmaceutical companies to secure continuous and sufficient supply of COVID-19 vaccines to cover the needs of the Lebanese population, irrespective of nationality
- Set in place the needed regulatory procedures for proper and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, whilst authorization of vaccine importation by the private sector
- Secure the needed policies, procedures, protocols, and pathways needed for optimal and safe deployment of COVID-19 vaccines at the level of PHC centers
- Apply a system for close monitoring of the COVID-19 vaccine deployment process that includes the number of doses delivered, data on beneficiaries, and adverse events
- Penalize the illegitimate delivery or utility of COVID-19 vaccines at PHC centers, including bypass of priority groups

FUNDERS

- Secure the needed funds for providing COVID-19 vaccines sufficient to cover the local needs
- Respond to the emerging costs due to the increased need for staff, equipment, trainings, and other needs that will ensue with COVID-19 deployment at PHC centers

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CENTERS

- Publicize and advertise for the free availability of COVID-19 vaccines at PHC centers
- Provide education for enhancing public knowledge on COVID-19 vaccines
- Comply with set regulations for safe COVID-19 vaccines deployment, including proper vaccine preparation, monitoring of cold chain and AEFI, and disposal of vaccine-related wastes
- Provide continuous needs assessment and feedback on the deployment process
- Maintain up-to-date knowledge of health professionals on new data related to COVID-19 vaccines
- While delivering COVID-19 vaccines, seize the opportunity for providing other health promotion and prevention services

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