

PrEP access highlights worrisome gap in vaccination coverage against HPV and other vaccine preventable STIs

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INTRODUCTION

PrEP use is rapidly increasing in Italy since its full reimbursement by the National Health System¹. PrEP allows STIs-exposed individuals to be managed in appropriate settings and being offered a number of preventing interventions. Among these, preventive vaccines against STIs are pivotal interventions among PrEP users. Aim of our study was to assess the prevalence of STIs vaccine coverage at the time of PrEP start as well as acceptability rate of newly vaccine offered.

METHODS

All individuals who accessed our PrEP service (Luigi Sacco Hospital, Milan) between January 2022 and February 2024 were included. Vaccination status was ascertained at the time of PrEP start by means of clinical interview and the assessment of the electronic vaccine certification when available. All unvaccinated individuals were proposed to receive HPV vaccination and all other available vaccines against STIs. Every dose of vaccine was recorded to electronic certificate.

RESULTS

During the study period, 348 individuals started PrEP at our center, primarily MSM (98%), along with 5 transgender women (1,4%) and 3 cisgender women (0.9%) (Figure 1). 251 (72%) individuals resulted HPV and/or other STIs-vaccine unexposed at the time of PrEP start (Figure 2). All but one individual started the STIs vaccination schedule: 210 underwent HPV vaccination, while 40 were already HPV-immunized and received other vaccines (Figure 2). Remarkably, over 99% of these patients immediately accepted the vaccination cycle when proposed.

CONCLUSION

The vaccination coverage for vaccine preventable STIs, in particular HPV vaccine², is worrisome low in people who presented at our STIs outpatient clinic to start PrEP. The immediate vaccine acceptance by almost all individuals highlights a serious information gap and access barriers in pivotal preventive interventions that deserve to be urgently filled. In particular, campaigns to inform about the importance of HPV vaccine before the start of sexual activity irrespectively of gender are urgently needed.

References

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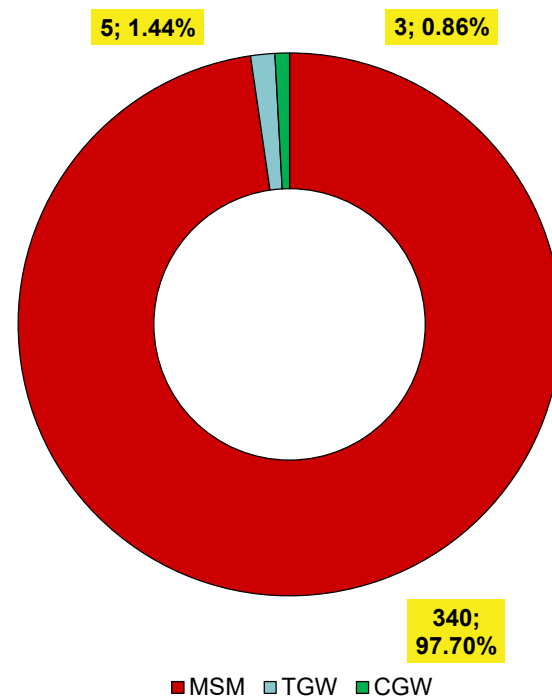


Figure 1. PrEP population

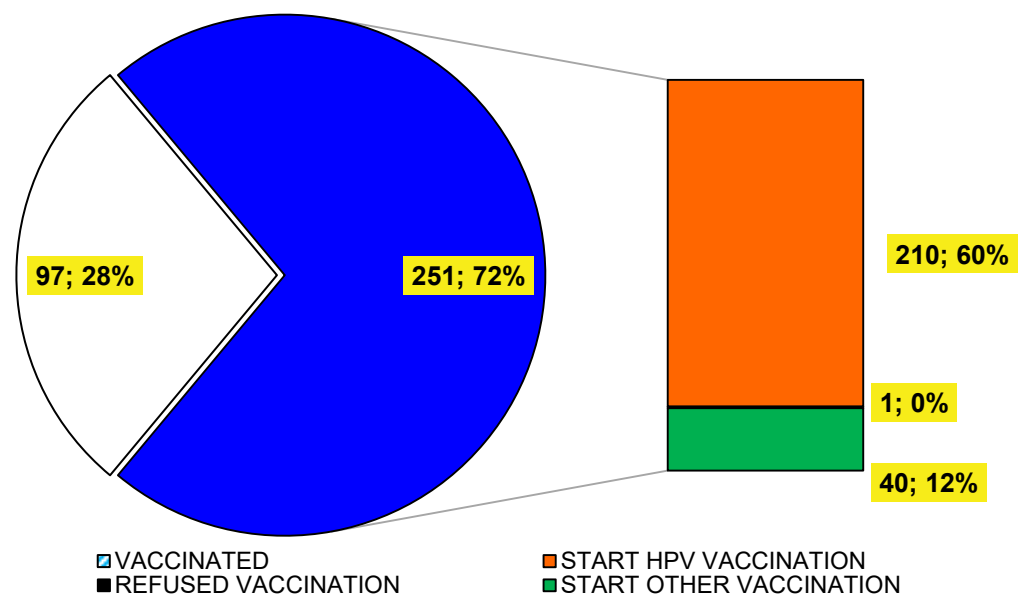


Figure 2. Vaccination status before PrEP and vaccination performed during PrEP