Some Young Adult Cancer Survivors Are Hesitant About COVID-19 Vaccines

These findings, however, may reflect regional attitudes in Utah and the surrounding area.

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In a study published in JNCI Cancer Spectrum, researchers found that a third of young people, who have recovered from cancer are reluctant to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

“As life returns to some resemblance of normal, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is as important as ever,” Austin Waters, MSPH, of Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, said in a press release. “Cancer survivors should not wait to get the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Currently, just over half the U.S. population is fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s COVID-19 vaccine tracker. People with active cancer—especially lung and blood cancers—are at greater risk for severe COVID-19, but this may not apply to those who have recovered and are no longer on treatment. Experts recommend that all people with cancer should receive COVID-19 vaccines, and most respond well to immunization.

Waters and colleagues set out to determine sociodemographic and COVID-19-related factors that might be linked to vaccine hesitancy among young adult cancer survivors.

The survey included 342 adults ages 18 years and older who were treated for cancer at Hutsman Cancer Institute between the ages of 15 and 39. The average age was approximately 29 years, 61% were women and 81% were white.

Despite the fact tht people with cancer are a priority vaccination group, some 37% of the study population reported being reluctant to get vaccinated.

In the study, young women were nearly twice as likely as their male counterparts to not be open to vaccination. Around 42% of the female participants were hesitant to be vaccinated compared with 30% of the male participants. Unfounded fears about the vaccine’s effect on fertility may have contributed to vaccine hesitancy, especially in a population that may have experienced the effects of cancer treatment on fertility.

Individuals with a high school education or less were three times more likely than college graduates to report vaccine hesitancy. Hispanic individuals (53%) were also more reluctant to be

vaccinated compared with white individuals (32%).

But in the Mountain West region where the survey was conducted, vaccine hesitancy may be a result of political leanings. Polls have found that Republicans are less willing to be vaccinated than Democrats. So, these results may be restricted to this particular region. Black and Latino people also have lower vaccination rates due to a combination of skepticism and disparities in access.

“Oncology care providers and cancer centers should play an important role in encouraging young survivors to receive the vaccine,” said Waters. “To ensure equitable protection of vulnerable populations, special attention should be paid to vaccine hesitancy among at risk groups such as young adult cancer survivors and groups that may have higher vaccine hesitancy such as female survivors or those with a high school education or less.”

Click here to read the study in JNCI Cancer Spectrum.
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