ABSTRACT

Psychological and behavioral responses towards the 2009-2010 A/H1N1v influenza pandemic in Lazio, Italy: results from PASSI surveillance

M.O. TRINITO, A. LANCIA, S. IACOVACCI[*], C. PERRIA[**]

Prevention Dept, Roma C Local Health Unit (LHU); [*] Prevention Dept, Latina LHU; [**] Agency for Public Health, Lazio Region, Italy

Monitoring perceptions, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of populations during pandemic flu outbreaks can provide useful information for planning and evaluating public health interventions.

PASSI is an ongoing surveillance system which investigates the lifestyles and the health status of the Italian adult population [1]. PASSI offered the opportunity to study people's psychological and behavioral responses towards the A/H1N1 influenza.

PASSI surveillance is carried out through monthly telephone interviews administered by personnel of participating Italian LHUs to a random sample of the resident population 18-69 years. In fall 2009, ten additional questions regarding the A/H1N1 flu were added to the standard questionnaire. In Lazio Region, 11/12 LHUs agreed to participate in the pandemic survey: 662 interviews were collected from 2nd November 2009 to 31th January 2010.

Statistical analyses were conducted with the software Stata 11. A complex survey design analysis was adopted, with appropriate weights taking into account the sampling system and the characteristics of the studied population [1].

Overall 29% of respondents considered it likely that they or their family would catch flu, 28% stated they were worried, 14% reported having limited some daily activities out of home, and 20% said they would accept vaccination if offered. All these indicators declined progressively in the three-month period of observation.

Willingness to be vaccinated decreased from 27% in November 2009 (when the epidemic curve reached its peak) to 14% in January 2010. For this indicator an association was found with worrying about pandemic and having a chronic disease.

More than 90% of respondents knew the main hygienic measures to control the spread of A/H1N1 virus. The most trusted sources of information were family doctors (82%).

Lazio's data were pooled and analyzed with those of other Italian LHUs: the results were promptly communicated [2].

Surveillance systems like PASSI are able to gather relevant information in emergency situations like a flu pandemic, allowing to detect rapid changes in people's perceptions and behaviors, such as worry about the disease and willingness to accept vaccination: in Lazio just about 1/4 of the adult population would agree to be vaccinated, even at the peak of the epidemic curve.

Obtaining such information is crucial for assessing and improving communication strategies and devising appropriate public health responses to the evolving situation [3].

References

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