

# HEPATITIS B VACCINATION STATUS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VACCINE AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS, INTEGRATED BIO-BEHAVIORAL SURVEY 2022, GEORGIA

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## Background

Hepatitis B is responsible for significant global disease burden and mortality despite the availability of safe and highly effective preventive vaccine. People who inject drugs (PWID) are at high risk of contracting and spreading HBV infection due to risky injection and sexual practices. Georgia is a country with intermediate to high burden of hepatitis B. The country has one of the highest rates of injection drug use in the world (national prevalence estimates for injection drug use is 2.24% in 18-64 years old population). Since 2000, Georgia incorporated HBV vaccine into routine immunization schedule for infants. While progress has been made in HBV vaccination coverage rates in infants, this indicator is still low among adult population, especially in high-risk groups, including PWID.

## Purpose

This study was conducted to determine hepatitis B vaccination status and attitude among PWID in Georgia.

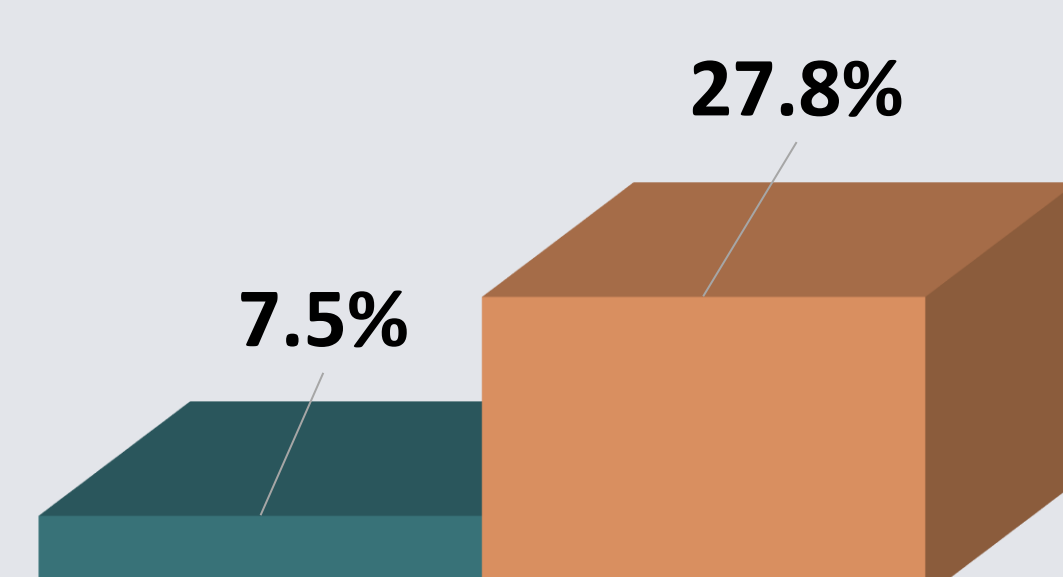
## Methods

Integrated bio-behavioral surveillance survey was conducted among PWID in seven major cities of Georgia in 2022. Study design was cross-sectional, using Respondent Driven Sampling method. In total 2005 PWID were enrolled. Data were collected through individual, face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire.

## Results

Only 7.5% of the respondents reported that they received vaccine against hepatitis B, of which 63.6% were vaccinated at medical facility, 20.5% - in prison and 9.9% - abroad. Among unvaccinated PWID only 27.8% expressed their willingness to get HBV vaccine. Of those study participants treated for chronic hepatitis C within the National HCV Elimination Program (which includes free hepatitis B vaccination) only 10.6% were vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Proportion of PWID vaccinated with HBV vaccine and proportion of unvaccinated PWID willing to get HBV vaccine



■ Vaccinated with HBV vaccine ■ Willing to get HBV vaccine

Statistically significant association was found between hepatitis B vaccination status and age, as younger PWID ( $\leq 35$  years) were less likely to be vaccinated compared to older ones (4.4% vs 8.4%; OR 0.5; 95%CI 0.3-0.8;  $p=0.005$ ).

Level of education was associated with the attitude towards HBV vaccination. Lower proportion of PWID with lower level of education (24.9%) were willing to get HBV vaccine compared to those with higher level of education (32.5%) (OR 0.7; 95%CI 0.5-0.9;  $p<0.005$ ).

HBV vaccination status by different characteristics among PWID

Characteristic	Vaccinated (%)	OR; 95% CI	P-value
<b>Age</b>			
≤ 35 years	4.4	0.5; 0.3-0.8	0.005
>35 years	8.4		
<b>Level of education</b>			
Low	24.9	0.7; 0.5-0.9	<0.005
High	32.5		

## Conclusions

Vaccination coverage for hepatitis B and willingness to get HBV vaccine is significantly low among PWID in Georgia. Educating PWID about importance of HBV vaccine and introduction of vaccination for hepatitis B at harm reduction centers and opioid substitution therapy clinics will increase the coverage of HBV vaccination. In addition, HCV elimination program providers should be instructed/recommended to improve HBV vaccination rates among the program beneficiaries, especially among high-risk individuals such as PWID.

## Acknowledgment

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