

## PERCEPTION OF COVID-19 VACCINATION AMONG SERBIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS

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**Background:** Although COVID-19 vaccination played a significant role in reducing pandemic spread, it is a subject of debate that creates confusion due to contradictory information coming from the scientific community and the media. The aims of this study were to obtain information on medical students' attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccination and to determine the main barriers to its acceptance.

**Methods and Objectives:** A cross-sectional study was performed at the Faculty of Medicine University of Belgrade during the 2022-2023 winter season. A total of 730 medical students completed the questionnaire in classrooms through an anonymous questionnaire. In data analysis, Chi-square test was used.

**Results:** The mean age of study participants was 23 years and 68.8% were female. The majority of medical students (91.2%) were vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccinated students, in comparison with non-vaccinated, significantly more often trusted health professionals when they recommend vaccination. Vaccinated students were significantly more in favor of mandatory vaccination ( $p < 0.001$ ), believed that the best preventive measure for COVID-19 infection is vaccination and that vaccines are safe ( $p < 0.001$ ), while unvaccinated students significantly more often believed that there was not enough time to test COVID-19 vaccines ( $p < 0.001$ ). As the most common reasons for vaccination, students state the desire to protect the people around them and because of the recommendation of a medical doctor. Unvaccinated students as the most common reason for not receiving the vaccine state the suspicion that the vaccines have not been tested enough and the fear of side effects. Both groups of students received the most information from medical doctors.

**Conclusions:** The present study gave much insight into the willingness of medical students in receiving the COVID-19 vaccines and showed that confidence in vaccines and trust in health authorities motivated Serbian medical students to receive COVID-19 vaccine.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, vaccine, medical students, cross-sectional study, acceptance