

C23

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Viral load suppression in people living with HIV before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brooklyn, New York

Consistent care is crucial for the health maintenance of people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (PWH). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic disrupted patient care in New York City (NYC), yet few studies investigated the association between COVID-19 and viral load suppression in PWH in NYC. We hypothesize that during the COVID-19 pandemic, PWH had less access to healthcare services which resulted in poor health outcomes. This study aims to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted viral load and CD4+ T-cell counts in PWH. Medical records of adult HIV patients (N = 1130) who visited the Special Treatment and Research (STAR) Health Center (SHC; Brooklyn, NY) between January 2019 and May 2023 were reviewed and compared across three timeframes. Demographic and clinical variables were assessed. 447/1116 (40%) patients did not have routine laboratory monitoring during the first phase of the pandemic compared with pre-pandemic. The mean HIV viral load was higher during the second phase of the pandemic compared with the pre-pandemic phase (P = 0.009). The percentages of patients with undetectable HIV viral load and numbers (mm³) of CD4+ T-cells were similar for all time periods. These findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated challenges for those individuals who already had barriers to medication adherence or access. However, most individuals were able to remain consistently on their antiretrovirals throughout the pandemic. Further studies are warranted to determine what could be done to mitigate the impact of future pandemics for the health of PWH.