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Assessment of the use and acceptability of electronic disease notification forms piloted during the COVID-19 response in Vanuatu, 2022

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Abstract

Background: The primary method for disease notification in Vanuatu is completion of paper forms or telephone notification to provincial surveillance officers. In 2022, an online notification form for COVID-19 was piloted to reduce reporting delays and missing reports. All government and private health care workers (HCWs) were requested to submit an online form for each newly detected COVID-19.

Methods: We conducted an assessment of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of HCWs in Vanuatu to help inform future developments for notification processes. All HCW in Vanuatu were invited to participate, including government and private. Recruitment occurred between August-September 2022. All HCWs were emailed a link to an electronic survey and provincial HCW were also telephoned with the option of a telephone interview. The survey assessed knowledge of the notification system, practices used to make COVID-19 notifications, acceptability of electronic notification systems and information, communication, and telecommunications equipment availability. Data were collated and analysed using Google Sheets.

Results: A total of 52 HCWs participated; the majority were from Shefa (39%) and Sanma (43%). Knowledge of notifiable diseases varied; half (49%) of participants knew that leptospirosis was notifiable, and three-quarters (73%) incorrectly reported that diabetes was notifiable. During the COVID-19 outbreak, three-quarters (77%) of participants routinely reported cases with reasons for not notifying including not knowing the requirement (38%) or having too many priorities (21%). Half (52%) of participants lacked regular computer access however 90% have access to a mobile phone.

Discussion: These findings suggest knowledge of notification processes awareness of notifiable diseases needs to be strengthened. It is recommended that the electronic notification system is expanded to other notifiable diseases but that notifications by mobile phones are explored. Additional research is needed in smaller provinces to fully grasp their context and their views on the use of electronic notification systems.