



Real-World Assessment of Vaccine Effectiveness Across Diverse Populations

Aisha Ndlovu*

Department of Public Health and Immunization Studies, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

DESCRIPTION

Vaccine effectiveness describes how well a vaccine protects people against disease under routine conditions outside controlled clinical trials. It is an important measure for public health because vaccination programs operate in populations with different ages, health conditions, exposure patterns, vaccination histories, and access to healthcare. Unlike vaccine efficacy, which is generally assessed under controlled research conditions, vaccine effectiveness is evaluated using observations from everyday healthcare and community settings. This distinction allows researchers to understand how a vaccine performs when it is used across large and diverse groups of people.

Several factors can influence vaccine effectiveness. The immune response of an individual can vary according to age, previous exposure to an infectious agent, nutritional status, medical conditions, and the timing of vaccination. The number of doses received and the interval between doses may also affect protection. In some cases, immunity can decline over time, which may influence disease outcomes months or years after the initial vaccination. These factors make real-world evaluation important because clinical trial results cannot always represent every circumstance encountered during routine vaccination.

Vaccine effectiveness is commonly estimated by comparing disease outcomes between vaccinated and unvaccinated populations. Researchers may examine rates of infection, symptomatic disease, hospitalization, severe complications, or death. For example, if a particular disease occurs less frequently among vaccinated people than among comparable unvaccinated individuals, statistical analysis can estimate the level of protection associated with vaccination. The resulting estimate is interpreted alongside information about the study population, disease patterns, and other factors that could influence the result.

One major source of information is electronic health data. Hospitals, clinics, laboratories, vaccination registries, and public health agencies may maintain records that can be analyzed to

evaluate vaccine performance. Researchers can link vaccination status with later health outcomes while applying appropriate privacy and data protection measures. These sources can provide information from large populations and can help identify changes in vaccine performance over time.

Observational studies are frequently used for effectiveness research. Cohort studies follow groups of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals and compare disease outcomes over a defined period. Case-control studies take another approach by comparing vaccination histories among people who developed a particular disease with those of individuals who did not. Test-negative designs are also commonly used for certain respiratory illnesses. In this method, people seeking care for compatible symptoms are tested, and vaccination status is compared between those who test positive and those who test negative for the disease under investigation.

The circulating strain of a pathogen can influence vaccine effectiveness. Some infectious agents undergo genetic changes that alter their biological characteristics. When a newly circulating strain differs from the strain targeted by a vaccine, the level of immune protection may change. Continuous disease surveillance can help researchers detect these differences and evaluate how vaccination performs against different strains. This information can be useful when decisions are made about updating vaccine formulations.

Time since vaccination is another important consideration. Immune protection does not necessarily remain constant throughout a person's lifetime. Antibody concentrations may decrease, while immune memory can provide longer-lasting protection. The pattern differs among vaccines and diseases. Researchers can therefore examine effectiveness according to the time elapsed since vaccination. Such studies may identify periods when additional doses could provide greater protection.

Age can also influence vaccine effectiveness. Children and older adults may respond differently to vaccination because their immune systems have different characteristics. Older individuals may sometimes develop weaker immune responses to certain vaccines, while younger populations can show strong responses.

Correspondence to: Aisha Ndlovu, Department of Public Health and Immunization Studies, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya, E-mail: aisha.ndlovu@uonbi.ac.ke

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Researchers may therefore calculate separate effectiveness estimates for different age groups rather than relying on one overall figure.

CONCLUSION

Vaccine effectiveness research provides valuable evidence about how immunization performs in real-world populations. It helps researchers understand differences among age groups,

vaccination schedules, disease strains, and periods following vaccination. By combining surveillance data, clinical information, laboratory testing, and appropriate statistical analysis, public health researchers can monitor protection and identify areas where vaccination programs may need adjustment. Continued assessment is important for maintaining effective disease prevention strategies and ensuring that immunization policies are supported by current population-level evidence.