

The General Public & Annual Flu Vaccination

Facilitators, Barriers, and Lessons Learned from CDC Research

CDC conducted research to find how the general public's knowledge and attitudes toward flu vaccine communication messages and strategies affect their likelihood to accept or reject influenza vaccination. This research identifies the facilitators and barriers to flu vaccination for the general public, including target sub-populations, as well as themes that can be applied to the development of flu vaccination communication messages and strategies for increasing flu vaccination coverage.



Background

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. CDC estimates that since 2010, flu-related hospitalizations in the United States have ranged from 140,000 to 710,000. The annual flu vaccine is the most effective way to prevent the flu. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every season.

CDC's [flu vaccination coverage data](#) found that about 41.7 percent of adults age 18 and older and 59.3 percent of children 6 months to 17 years old were vaccinated during the 2015-2016 flu season. Research suggests that support and recommendations from health care workers and personalized communications are critical factors for the increase of seasonal flu vaccine coverage.

CDC has done a variety of communication research projects exploring a variety of populations, including the general public and targeted sub-populations, to assist in flu vaccination promotion, communication, and messaging efforts.

Methodology

CDC reviewed flu vaccine-related research from 2000 through 2013 to gain an in-depth understanding around the reasons associated with people's decisions to get a flu vaccination, as well as barriers to flu vaccination. The qualitative meta-analysis reviewed 29 studies, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, survey research, and message testing. The participants of the studies represented a range of audiences from the general public.

Results

This analysis found a number of facilitators and barriers to getting a flu vaccination based on the general public's attitudes and beliefs toward influenza vaccine. Factors associated with being more accepting to flu vaccine include having:

- A basic understanding of flu, such as symptoms, how flu spreads, timing of flu season, and how long flu illness can last
- Been sick from the flu or having a family member or friend who has been sick from the flu
- Heard and/or seen a promotion of flu vaccination through public service announcements, advertising, and media news stories are more likely to accept a flu vaccine.

Generally, people who consider themselves to be young and healthy and believe that the vaccine doesn't work are less likely to accept a flu vaccine. Also, those who have had prior experience with the flu and believe the vaccine caused them to get the flu or consider the flu to be a manageable illness are more likely to reject the flu vaccination.

Facilitators & Barriers to Flu Vaccination

Attitudes and beliefs of nurses and allied health professionals influencing the decision to get a seasonal flu vaccine are displayed in the table below.

AUDIENCE	Facilitators to Flu Vaccination	Barriers to Flu Vaccination
Adults 50+ years old/ Adults with Chronic Medical Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who believe they are at risk of getting the flu, such as those who have an existing chronic condition • People who believe that the flu is a serious health threat, such as those who have a chronic condition and increased chance of complications • People who are older or have a chronic health conditions believe the flu vaccine will prevent the flu or reduce the severity of flu illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who have a chronic medical condition believe that if they effectively manage their medical problems, they don't need a flu vaccine
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents who rely on information and instructions from healthcare professionals will likely get their child vaccinated if a health care professional recommends it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents who think their children are healthy or have a strong immune system don't believe their children need a flu shot • Parents who don't believe the flu vaccine is effective
Hispanics and African Americans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Americans who believe the vaccination will make flu symptoms less severe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Americans who believe many misconceptions and have fears about the flu and the flu vaccine, such as the flu vaccine gives you the flu • African Americans and Hispanic Americans who believe doctors suggest needless vaccinations for profit

Research to Practice

After identifying the themes above, we developed communication materials and messages to increase facilitators to flu vaccination and decrease barriers. Below are examples of communication messages and strategies that have been shown to influence flu vaccination rates based on the findings of this research analysis.

How to Design Effective Messages	What Flu Vaccine Education Is Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the specific audience and what they care about. • Use positive messages that stress prevention or encourage vaccination as a way to have control over their health. • Focus vaccination messages to healthy adults and parents on how the flu and flu vaccine affects them and their family. • Include messages with recommendations from sources parents trust, such as health care professionals and the CDC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address misconceptions about causes and symptoms of the flu and flu vaccination for the general public as well as Hispanic and African American populations. • Explain risk of getting flu to individuals with chronic conditions

For more information, visit: www.cdc.gov/flu or call 1-800-CDC-INFO