

Universal flu vaccine holds promise

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An influenza vaccine that protects against death and serious complications from different strains of flu is a little closer to reality, Saint Louis University vaccine researchers have found.

"This is a significant first step in developing a universal [vaccine](#) to help protect against pandemic influenza," said Robert Belshe, M.D., director of the Saint Louis University Center for [Vaccine Development](#).

Belshe, the lead researcher who studied a vaccine made with proteins from [strains](#) of influenza viruses A and B, presents his findings on April 27 at the National Foundation for Infectious Disease Conference for Vaccine Research in Baltimore.

Currently drug companies manufacture a different flu vaccine each year to match the strains of influenza that researchers predict will circulate. Adding a universal influenza vaccine to a seasonal vaccine would help improve protection against strains of influenza as they change each year.

"Novel vaccines, capable of inducing long-lasting, broad immunity against divergent strains, including potential pandemic viruses, are highly desirable," Belshe said.

In the study, 377 healthy adults received three injections of a universal [influenza vaccine](#), known as Bivalent Influenza Peptide Conjugate Vaccine (BIPCV), over a six month period.

Researchers found that a low dose of the vaccine is well tolerated and

safe, Belshe said. In addition, the low dose vaccine evoked an immune response - high antibody titers - that is similar to levels associated with protecting small animals infected with influenza from serious disease and death. More testing is needed, Belshe added.

The research also is significant in light of the search for a vaccine to protect against a deadly [influenza](#) pandemic, which is a global outbreak of the disease that spreads quickly with lethal consequences.

Source: Saint Louis University

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