

Universal influenza vaccination may reduce antibiotic use

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We all know that influenza vaccination helps prevent disease, but a new study from Canada suggests it may also prevent another public health problem: inappropriate antibiotic use. The findings come from a new study in the September 1, 2009 issue of *Clinical Infectious Disease*, which is now available online.

Starting in 2000, the Canadian province of Ontario introduced a universal immunization program offering free influenza vaccines to anyone 6 months of age or older. Other provinces continued to target only high-risk groups and their contacts for vaccination. The authors compared prescription rates for influenza-associated respiratory [antibiotics](#) before and after the Ontario program began, and compared the Ontario prescription rates with those of other provinces.

The broader immunization effort in Ontario was associated with a 64 percent decline in these antibiotic prescriptions compared with the other provinces that maintained targeted vaccination programs. Additionally, influenza-associated mortality fell 39 percent. Flu-related hospitalizations, emergency department use, and doctors' office visits also fell an average of 52 percent.

Influenza and upper respiratory conditions account for a substantial number of antibiotic prescriptions, even though antibiotics don't work against viruses such as the flu. The overuse of antibiotics and the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria continue to be serious public health problems. According to study author Fawziah Marra, PharmD, of

the University of British Columbia, the study's findings suggest that "jurisdictions wishing to decrease antibiotic use might consider programs to increase [influenza vaccination](#)."

Source: [Infectious Diseases](#) Society of America ([news](#) : [web](#))

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