

Swine flu vaccine met with a big dose of skepticism

October 15 2009, By Delthia Ricks

Brian LaVane, owner of Huntington Stamp and Coin, a hub for local collectors, has avoided seasonal flu shots for decades, but now he's weighing whether to be immunized against H1N1, the swine flu.

He simply isn't convinced.

"I just had bypass surgery six months ago and I asked my cardiologist about the swine [flu shot](#). He didn't say to get it and he didn't say not to get it," LaVane said. "I'm planning to talk to him again in November."

In his uncertainty, LaVane has plenty of company. Even with [pandemic](#) swine flu on a run around the globe, several recent surveys have revealed a wide range of vaccine objectors and skeptics.

Doubters include parents who don't want their children vaccinated because of misgivings about the vaccine; [health care workers](#) opposed to mandatory vaccinations; healthy adults who don't think they will catch the flu; and people, even some in high-risk groups, who are uncertain about vaccines.

Many who oppose vaccination fear the vaccine is untested, a claim contradicted by infectious disease experts.

"I am very comfortable getting the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available for people like me," said Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of immunization and respiratory diseases at the [Centers for Disease Control](#)

[and Prevention](#). "But I realize that everybody has to make their own decisions, the best decision for the health of their family and themselves."

In a Sept. 28 survey, Consumer Reports found just 35 percent of parents plan to have their children vaccinated. A week later, a Harvard School of Public Health survey found 51 percent of parents plan to have their children immunized. Forty percent of adults in the same survey were "absolutely certain" they would be vaccinated. Late last week, a third poll, this one by The Associated Press and GfK, found more than a third of parents did not want their children vaccinated for H1N1.

In a typical year, the federal government estimates, 34 percent of Americans receive vaccines against seasonal flu.

among key constituents opposed to swine flu vaccination are parents whose children have autism. Many of them claim a link between vaccines and the proliferation of the neurodevelopmental condition.

Laurie Murdock, founder of The Mosaic School in Wantagh, N.Y., designed for children with autism, said she isn't having her two sons with the condition vaccinated. Nor would the school consider having students vaccinated there.

"I am prepared to deal with the flu," Murdock said. "We deal with it every year. I know there are a lot of statements about it being very dangerous. But I've also heard some things to the contrary. I really hope that I don't have to eat those words."

Chrissy Martone of Huntington, said she's on the fence about having her healthy 3-year-old daughter, Hannah, immunized. "She's gotten all her shots," Martone said, referring to standard childhood vaccines. "But this is so new, I don't know if it's really been tested enough."

With so much skepticism in the air, Robert Blendon, director of the Harvard poll, said if health officials want more people to line up for vaccinations, "they will need to address the public's concerns in the coming weeks."

Allaying concerns could mean stemming a wave of anti-vaccination information flowing from the Internet. Some sites, such as www.theflu-case.com, promote conspiracy theories, claiming the vaccine is intended to cause "mass genocide." And bloggers on various sites have encouraged "[swine flu](#) parties," get-togethers where kids are supposed to catch the flu to avoid vaccination.

Schuchat vouched for the vaccine's safety, saying it is manufactured identically to the seasonal inoculation, which has a superb safety record. She noted 76 children had died nationwide since H1N1 began circulating last spring.

Some parents, such as Nancie Steinberg of Manhattan, are heeding the government's warning and will have their children vaccinated. "My sons are 3 and 11 and my pediatrician told me there are no side effects, which is what I was most concerned about," Steinberg said.

But the polls also found vaccine skepticism isn't relegated to parents making decisions about children. The Consumer Reports poll found 63 percent of adults believed in building their natural immunity rather than taking a vaccine.

Keri Chiappino, a Smithtown, N.Y., chiropractor, who believes in boosting her natural defenses, said she will not be immunized because of concerns about vaccine additives, such as preservatives and other compounds. "At this time there have not been enough studies done on the vaccination itself," she said.

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