

American adults receiving flu vaccine at about the same rate as in 2008, study finds

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American adults are not being vaccinated against the seasonal flu any more often than they were last year, despite increased public discussion of the importance of influenza vaccines resulting from the worldwide outbreak of the H1N1 virus, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

As of the middle of November, about 32 percent of all U.S. adults and 37 percent of adults recommended to receive a flu vaccination had been inoculated against the seasonal influenza, according to the study.

Researchers also found that 17 percent of all adults and 19 percent of those recommended for vaccination intended to receive the seasonal [flu vaccine](#) by the end of the vaccination season.

"It does not appear that the increased public discussion of the role of influenza vaccines has had a significantly impact on the public's behavior," said Katherine Harris, the study's lead author and a senior economist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Most of the results from our latest survey look much like those from last year,"

Health officials recommend the seasonal flu vaccine for about 70 percent of American adults, including people over age 50, those with high-risk medical conditions, health care workers and those who care for children under age 5. There are different recommendations for the H1N1 flu vaccine, which protects against the pandemic [influenza strain](#).

One difference from last year noted by new survey is that adults began getting the seasonal flu vaccine earlier this year. Uptake of the seasonal vaccine during September was nearly three times as high -- about 9 percent in 2009 versus 3 percent in 2008. Yet, vaccine uptake through mid-November this year was comparable to uptake during the same period last year.

In addition, about half of health care workers had been vaccinated by the middle of November this year, roughly the same proportion that was vaccinated during the entire season last year. However, 40 percent of health care workers reported they had no intention of being vaccinated despite the risk of transmitting influenza to patients.

The findings are from a representative national survey conducted during the middle of November that asked more than 5,000 adults about their vaccination status and related issues. The survey is the latest in a series done by RAND and supported by GlaxoSmithKline, a manufacturer of flu vaccine.

Researchers say the study was designed to help inform public health officials and others about progress toward vaccinating adults prior to the end of the vaccination season while action can still be taken to improve uptake.

The study found that 29 percent of adults stated that they did not have the time to get vaccinated. In addition, seasonal flu vaccine availability may be a significant reason more adults have not been vaccinated. Among those intending to be vaccinated, about 38 percent said there was no vaccine available when they tried to get inoculated.

"This finding highlights one of the public health challenges that we face in a year when a pandemic flu has made an appearance," Harris said.

"The early surge of uptake was attributed to additional awareness about

seasonal flu vaccination in a pandemic year. It's important to keep this early interest in mind when planning for future pandemics."

Other finding from the study include:

- There was little evidence that people were forgoing seasonal [influenza vaccine](#) in order to be vaccinated against H1N1.
- Health care providers were widely seen as the best source of information about vaccinations. About 44 percent of vaccinated adults said their health provider was the most influential source of information; unvaccinated adults were less reliant on health care providers and more reliant on news reports than those who had received a flu vaccine.
- White adults were more likely to be vaccinated than other racial groups. Hispanic adults were the least likely to have received a seasonal [flu](#) vaccine.

Source: RAND Corporation

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