

## Nearly half of Americans believe H1N1 outbreak is over, poll finds

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The latest poll from researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) shows that almost half of Americans believe the H1N1 flu outbreak is over (44%), and levels of concern about getting sick with the virus continue to decline. Few (18%) think it is "very likely" there will be another widespread outbreak of the H1N1 virus in the U.S. during the next 12 months, although a larger share of the population (43%) does say such an outbreak is "somewhat likely." After an initial period of vaccine shortage, 70% of adults said there is now enough vaccine in their community for everyone who wants it. The national poll was conducted January 20-24, 2010.

At this point, more than half of parents (53%) either got the [vaccine](#) for their children (40%) or intend to get it before the end of February 2010 (13%). The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) had identified children as a priority group for the vaccine. Among adults, 37% either got the H1N1 vaccine for themselves (21%) or intend to do so before February ends (16%). If perceptions that the outbreak is over spread, those who now say they intend to get the vaccine may ultimately decide not to. The poll also revealed a substantial share of adults who said they have not gotten the vaccine and do not intend to (61%).

"Many parents heeded the [public health](#) message to vaccinate their children against this virus, which hit young people unexpectedly hard," said Professor [[ Robert Blendon]], Director of the Harvard Opinion Research Program and an expert in understanding the public response to emergencies that involve health threats. "But there remains a steady core

of adults who, regardless of messaging and other efforts, has chosen not to get the H1N1 vaccine. This group's set of attitudes has proven very difficult for public health officials to change."

The poll, which examines the American public's attitudes and response to distribution of H1N1 vaccine this winter, is the eighth in a series on public views concerning the H1N1 flu outbreak undertaken by the Harvard Opinion Research Program at HSPH.

"Our results show there was broad awareness of public health messages on H1N1; approximately three-fourths of the public reported seeing ads regarding the importance of getting the H1N1 vaccine since December, but many people did not respond to the message," said Gillian K. SteelFisher, research scientist in the HSPH Department of Health Policy and Management and assistant director of the Harvard Opinion Research Program.

## **Almost Half of People Think the H1N1 Outbreak is Already Over**

When asked if they think there are "still many cases of people getting sick from the H1N1 flu," almost half of adults (44%) said that "the outbreak is over," while 39% thought there are still many cases of people getting sick. Concern levels are correspondingly down from a peak in September when more than half of adults (52%) were concerned that they or someone in their immediate family might get sick from H1N1 during the next 12 months. The latest poll showed only 32% still concerned.

## **Adequacy of Vaccine Supply**

After an initial period of vaccine shortage, 70% of adults said there is

now enough vaccine in their community for everyone who wants it, which is significantly more than in December (48%) or November (21%). However, 12% think there is still a shortage in their community.

Only 5% of the public currently believes there is "too much" vaccine in their community, but there may ultimately be more vaccine available than will be immediately used by the public. Findings from this poll suggest that a majority of the public nonetheless believes it is more appropriate for public health officials to purchase "enough vaccine so there is no possibility of a shortage in the long run, even if this decision means that they will spend money on vaccines that are not used" rather than order a more limited supply of vaccine that might mean "there is a shortage if it turns out more people than estimated want the vaccine" (59% vs. 38%).

## **Majority of Adults Do Not Intend to Get the Vaccine, but a Majority of Children Have Been or Will be Vaccinated**

Since the beginning of November, according to this latest poll, there has been an increase in the number of adults overall who have gotten the H1N1 vaccine (21% in January vs. 14% in December vs. 5% in November). Of those adults who did get the vaccine, 90% received the injectable form, while 10% received the nasal spray. However, a significant majority of all adults (61%) did not get the vaccine and do not intend to. Most frequently, adults indicated that the "major" reasons for not getting the vaccine for themselves were: They don't think the H1N1 outbreak is as serious now as public officials once thought (37%); they are concerned about safety risks from the vaccine (35%); they do not think they are at risk of getting a serious case of H1N1 (30%); and they believe that they can get medication to treat the illness if they do get sick (27%).

"The skepticism of this group indicates that, going forward, it may be difficult to get more movement in the percentage of adults vaccinated for H1N1 or for a similarly behaving new flu virus," said Blendon.

Parents, however, have made more efforts to vaccinate their children. This latest poll found that 53% of parents got the vaccine for all or some of their children or intend to get it for them before the end of February 2010. Parents who say they intend to get the vaccine may decide not to if perceptions that the outbreak is over spread.

Among parents who did get their children vaccinated, most got their children vaccinated at traditional sites including a physician's/other health care provider's office (46%) or a health clinic (22%). However, following significant efforts by public health officials to engage schools in H1N1 vaccination programs, nearly a third (29%) say their children were vaccinated at a school. The majority of parents say their children got the injectable vaccine (61%) while 35% got the nasal spray.

For those parents who did not get the vaccine for their children and do not intend to (44%), the most commonly cited "major" reason for this decision was a concern about the safety of the vaccine (56%).

Secondarily, parents who made this decision explained that they could treat H1N1 with medication if their children got sick with it (33%), and they don't think the H1N1 outbreak is as serious now as public officials once thought (32%).

## **Satisfaction With Public Health Response**

A majority of adults (59%) rated the overall response of public health officials to the H1N1 outbreak as "excellent" or "good." Conversely, 39% rated the overall response as "fair" or "poor." In the view of more than half of adults (54%), public health officials spent "the right amount" of attention on the H1N1 flu outbreak, but 26% said they spent

"too much" attention, and 16% said they spent "too little." Intensive public health advertising about the importance of getting the H1N1 flu vaccine, including posters, billboards, web-based ads, television or newspaper ads, was reported as seen by 76% of adults since the beginning of December 2009.

Previous polls concerning the H1N1 flu outbreak undertaken by the Harvard Opinion Research Program (HORP) at HSPH are listed below:

"Poll Finds Three Quarters of Parents Who Tried to Get H1N1 Vaccine for Their Children Have Gotten It," December 22, 2009

"Poll: Travelers Taking Significantly More Precautions Against H1N1 and Seasonal Flu on Trips This Year," December 10, 2009

"Poll Finds Two-thirds of Parents and High-priority Adults Who Tried to Get H1N1 Vaccine Were Unable to Get It," November 6, 2009.

"Survey Finds Just 40% of Adults Absolutely Certain They Will Get H1N1 Vaccine," October 2, 2009

"National Survey Finds Six in Ten Americans Believe Serious Outbreak of Influenza A (H1N1) Likely in Fall/Winter," July 15, 2009

"Survey Finds Many Americans Have Taken Steps to Protect Themselves Against H1N1," May 8, 2009

"Survey Finds Nearly Half of Americans Concerned They Or Their Family May Get Sick from Swine Flu," May 1, 2009.

Another survey from HORP looked at business preparedness:

"Four-Fifths of Businesses Foresee Severe Problems Maintaining

Operations If Significant H1N1 [Flu Outbreak](#)," September 9, 2009

## Methodology

This poll is part of an on-going series of surveys focused on the public's response to public health emergencies by the Harvard Opinion Research Program (HORP) at Harvard School of Public Health. The study was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH). The project director is Robert J. Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health. The research team also includes Gillian K. SteelFisher, John M. Benson, Mark M. Bekheit and Robin C. Herman of the Harvard School of Public Health, as well as Melissa J. Herrmann of SSRS/ICR, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (including both landline and cell phone) for HORP by SSRS/ICR of Media (PA) January 20 through January 24, 2010 among a nationally representative sample of 1,419 respondents age 18 and older, including 377 parents. The sample included 130 Hispanics and 160 African Americans. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.24% at the 95% confidence level.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases, sample data are weighted to the most recent Census data available from the Current Population Survey for gender, age, race, education, and region. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

Provided by Harvard School of Public Health

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