

# Social networks influence flu shot decision among college students

May 14 2012, By Laura Kennedy

---



College students' social networks influence their beliefs regarding the safety of influenza vaccines and decisions about vaccination, according to a new study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

The most influential people seem to be spouses, parents and friends, said study author Sean Richey, Ph.D., a [political scientist](#) at Georgia State University. “We show that a path to influencing the college students’ beliefs about vaccinations may be through their social networks,” said Richey. “So, public health officials may try to target the students’ parents with information, for example, in addition to the students themselves.”

[College students](#) face elevated risk for seasonal flu because they often live in close quarters where infectious disease can easily spread, noted

Richey. Yet, during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, 30 percent of the surveyed students viewed the [vaccine](#) as unsafe, and only 10 percent chose to be vaccinated.

For the online survey, students were asked to identify four people with whom they discuss health matters. Students who believed their parents, spouses or friends were supportive of vaccination reported higher beliefs in vaccine safety and that they were more likely to intend to get the flu vaccine.

“Vaccine decisions [are] a behavior that we have very little data on, and we did not know that social networks would influence those decisions,” observed Thomas Valente, Ph.D., an expert on social networks at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California.

The study is promising, he added, because social networks and their perceived support for vaccines are “amenable to change.”

The study is based on responses from more than 1,000 undergraduates at a large public university in Georgia. Demographics of the participants closely match those of the university’s diverse student body.

Richey notes that the survey was only offered to students in an introductory political science class and thus may not be representative of students in general. Also, he said, “We cannot observe the flow of vaccine information within discussion networks,” making it hard to determine who influences who. Richey and his colleagues are planning to conduct a more detailed study later this year.

“Trials that test network manipulations to accelerate vaccine adoption are also needed,” added Valente.

**More information:** Brendan Nyhan, et al. (2012). The Role of Social

Networks in Influenza Vaccine Attitudes and Intentions Among College Students in the Southeastern United States, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, [doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.02.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.02.014)

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

Citation: Social networks influence flu shot decision among college students (2012, May 14)  
retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-05-social-networks-flu-shot-decision.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--