

# College students report low flu vaccine rate

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College football and basketball games may provide more than a way for students to show school spirit – they could help prevent the flu.

According to a new study by researchers at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, colleges and universities should implement new or improved [influenza vaccine](#) strategies, such as giving [flu](#) shots at sporting events or during campus-wide, day-long campaigns, to increase the number of their students who get the annual [flu vaccine](#).

In the early online edition of the December issue of the *Journal of American College Health*, the researchers found that only one in five college students at eight North Carolina universities reported getting a [flu shot](#) during the 2009–10 [flu season](#).

"Influenza virus is contagious and is known to circulate through college campuses, enhanced by close living quarters, typical social activities and low [vaccine coverage](#)," said Kathy Poehling, M.D., associate professor pediatrics at Wake Forest Baptist and lead author of the study.

"With [influenza virus](#) already being detected this November, it is likely to increase in the next one to three months and may overlap with exam periods. Although it is hard to predict the severity of the coming flu season, we usually have more [influenza activity](#) after a mild season like last year's."

In this study, believed to be the first multi-university study to assess seasonal flu vaccine coverage, a total of 4,090 college students

participated in a confidential, web-based survey in late October and November 2009 regarding whether they had received a flu shot.

Overall, 20 percent of the students reported they had been vaccinated during a year in which significant media attention focused on both seasonal and H1N1 flu. The seasonal vaccine coverage varied across the eight universities from 14 percent to 30 percent, which was considerably less than half of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' 2020 Healthy People goal of 80 percent coverage for healthy persons 18 to 64 years of age.

In addition, the researchers found that students more often reported receiving the vaccine from a private physician or clinic rather than from student health services, even though it was available free of charge.

Poehling said that the findings of this study, as well as results of previous studies conducted by other institutions, suggest that a multifaceted approach is needed to target students who live both on and off campus. University administrators will need to use a variety of communication approaches and be creative in their outreach efforts to encourage more students to get the annual flu vaccine, she said.

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

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