

# Patients more likely to get flu shots when doctors make appointments

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

You're much more likely to get a flu shot if your doctor makes the appointment for you, Rutgers researchers have discovered.

A Rutgers study has found that doctors who take a proactive stance and schedule flu shots for patients can dramatically increase vaccination

rates.

In the study, published in the journal *Behavioral Science and Policy*, Rutgers researchers report that patients are three times more likely to get vaccinations when their physicians make appointments than when they are invited to make the appointments themselves.

"Vaccination is the single most important thing to do to prevent communicative diseases, and not nearly enough people get vaccinated," says Gretchen Chapman, a lead author of the study and a professor of psychology in the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. "Prescheduled appointments are a simple intervention that clinics can use to increase [vaccination rates](#)."

The vaccine administered in the study was for viral influenza - a disease against which doctors recommend patients be vaccinated annually.

To conduct their study, researchers divided the 886 patients at a medical practice into three groups. They found that 16 percent of the patients who had appointments made for them showed up for the vaccine, while only 5 percent of those who were invited to make their own appointments did so. Only 2 percent of those who got no instructions showed up for vaccinations.

Chapman and her co-authors wanted to know whether pre-scheduling appointments merely attracted patients to the doctor's office who were planning to get vaccinated anyway at work, or at their local pharmacy. They found that the "displacement effect" - the moving of vaccinations from one venue to another - didn't happen. Getting doctors' offices to take the extra step to reduce the risks of influenza could get more people vaccinated.

"Every year, the particular group of viruses is mutable, keeps modifying

genetically, so the shot you got last year may not work this year," says Elaine Leventhal, professor emerita of medicine at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, in whose practice the study was conducted.

Provided by Rutgers University

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