

# Why only half of healthcare workers have the flu vaccine

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Credit: Lancaster University

The low uptake of flu vaccination among medical students and doctors is influenced by social attitudes say researchers.

Despite a recommendation from the Chief Medical Officer for England that all [healthcare workers](#) are vaccinated annually, only 55 percent are protected against the spread of influenza, this could contribute to staff sickness and mortality among [elderly patients](#).

Rhiannon Edge, Dawn Goodwin, Rachel Isba, Thomas Keegan from Lancaster Medical School interviewed [junior doctors](#) and [medical students](#) to find out about their opinions of the [flu vaccination](#) and why they might not be vaccinated.

They said: "We found the themes of socialisation, understanding of the vaccine, and convenience to be important in whether or not the individual vaccinated."

Senior staff are crucial in shaping the medical culture which influences the attitudes of junior doctors and medical students.

One vaccinated junior doctor said: "I copy what my consultants do – so if they don't do it then I don't do it."

Peer pressure also influenced the decision whether to be vaccinated or not, overcoming the indifference towards vaccination found among most of the participants in the study.

"When you know your friends are taking it, it feels like I will have it too, like I don't want to be different."

One junior doctor described how "we tend to do it in groups" when describing the decision to accept or decline the jab.

They were also influenced by their experiences of patients with flu in hospital.

"I didn't think that flu could be so bad... but working in a hospital for the first time as a doctor, and seeing what can happen... that's quite scared me and I think that would definitely make me want to vaccinate more."

Although [social attitudes](#) were important, the defining feature in deciding whether to be vaccinated was convenience. Some participants even vaccinated each other so they could practice giving injections as part of their medical training.

**More information:** Rhiannon Edge et al. Socialization, Indifference, and Convenience: Exploring the Uptake of Influenza Vaccine Among Medical Students and Early Career Doctors, *Qualitative Health Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/1049732317720664](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317720664)

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