

The Flu Vaccine Gets a Bad Rap, but it is Still Worth Getting



By Julianna LeMieux — February 24, 2018



Flu shot [1]

I have had the flu for two weeks. Well, to be honest, I never did get the test to confirm that it was, indeed, the flu. But, I am ok self-diagnosing this one based on the high fever, aches, chills, headache, sore throat, and barking cough. Rapid flu test or not, I'm going to call flu on this one.

Did I get the flu shot? Yes.

Was it worth it even though I ended up with the flu? Yes.

I knew that having my family get their flu shots would not insure that we would skip flu season completely. That is simply too high of an expectation for an infectious disease that spreads as effectively as the flu in a society where people opt out of the vaccine. On top of that, we happen to live in a city packed with people in a season where we spend most of our time inside - near each other. Not enough people get the flu shot to halt circulation of the virus in a crowded population like this one. Lastly, the vaccine is not 100% effective.

But, how effective is the flu vaccine this year? I have heard, this season, numbers ranging from 10% effective to 60% effective. It turns out, the real number is somewhere in between.

How do we know how effective the flu vaccine is?

During each influenza season since 2004–05, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has estimated the effectiveness of the seasonal flu vaccine to prevent laboratory-confirmed influenza. This year's [report was just released in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) [2] (MMWR.)

Data from 4,562 children and adults enrolled in the U.S. Influenza Vaccine Effectiveness Network

(U.S. Flu VE Network) during November 2, 2017–February 3, 2018 was analyzed to obtain the data.

During this period, overall adjusted vaccine effectiveness (VE) against influenza A and influenza B virus infection was 36%.

That number can be broken down further into the types of flu viruses that are circulating. That said, most (69%) influenza infections this season have been caused by A (H3N2) viruses. The vaccine effectiveness for the three major strains was estimated to be

- 25% against illness caused by influenza A (H3N2) virus
- 67% against A (H1N1) viruses
- 42% against influenza B viruses

CDC continues to recommend vaccination, even as flu season starts to come to its conclusion. But, the currently circulating influenza viruses are expected to continue circulating for several weeks.

As for my own personal case, two out of five of us in the house ended up with the flu. But, I can only imagine that it would have been a lot worse for us without the flu shots. My son ended up missing two days of school, not five like some of his classmates. And, the other two children escaped it, even though they lived in the same house as people who were coughing constantly.

So, is the current flu vaccine perfect? No, but it is worth getting. Especially when you consider that there have already been 97 pediatric deaths this season and most of those children were unvaccinated.

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6706a2.htm?s_cid=mm6706a2_w [2]

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[2] https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6706a2.htm?s_cid=mm6706a2_w