80,000 Died from Flu (and Still 0 from GMOs)

By Alex Berezow, PhD — November 6, 2018

We had a really bad flu season this year. The CDC just announced that about 80,000 Americans were killed.

To put that into perspective, that is roughly double the number of suicides and quadruple the number of homicides in recent years. In fact, the influenza death toll could be the highest we have seen in about 40 years [2].

It's not like we didn't warn you. H3N2 strains of influenza are really bad news [3], and it was precisely this type of flu virus that dominated the winter of 2017-18. That is why we (and all major public health agencies) beg and plead for people to get their flu shots every year.

The begging and pleading doesn't seem to work. Only about 37% of American adults [4] bothered to get a flu shot, which is actually a decrease from the previous year, when about 43% got one. So even though health officials and the media warned Americans that this past flu season was going to be really bad, Americans flat-out ignored them.

We did, however, buy more organic food than ever before.

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This is the great paradox of risk perception. Humans are just terrible at understanding risk. We know for a fact that tens of thousands of Americans will die every single year from the flu. We have a tool -- albeit an imperfect one -- that could help greatly reduce that number. But instead of using it, Americans have come up with a list of (entirely debunked [5]) excuses for not getting the flu jab.

On the flip side, Americans think GMOs are scary and pesticides are giving them cancer. (Neither of those beliefs are true.) Consequently, the public falsely thinks that they can make themselves
healthier by purchasing organic food, sales of which hit record highs year after year [6].

Oh, the irony. Americans prefer to avoid the (relatively low risk) flu shot, putting them at greater danger from the (relatively high risk) flu. Likewise, people prefer to avoid (relatively low risk) GMOs by driving in their (relatively high risk) automobiles to Whole Foods.

A large group of unvaccinated organic food shoppers. What could possibly go wrong? [7]

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