

# Vaccine surplus is a result of perceived but baseless public fears

By ACSH Staff — November 30, 2010

The vast skepticism held by many Americans about vaccines may be the [reason](#) [1] why in excess of 70 million doses of H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine were left unused in the spring of 2010, according to a new study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Even when word of the H1N1 pandemic broke out last year and fear of the virus was widespread, fewer than half of all adults surveyed were willing to get vaccinated. Those who regularly received seasonal flu shots were four times more likely to get the H1N1 vaccine, suggesting that a public perception of risks posed by vaccines may be the greatest hurdle that health authorities will have to overcome to ensure innoculation is broadly practiced.

Part of this may date back to a lingering — and faulty — collective memory which associates the so-called Swine Flu vaccine of 1976 with a risk of suffering Guillain-Barre syndrome. These claims lack evidence, says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross.

“Increasing the public’s acceptance of vaccination may be more difficult than addressing the technical and scientific challenges involved in quickly producing large quantities of a safe and effective vaccine,” the study researchers say.

ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom proposes one way to get more people vaccinated: “Just tell everyone that there’s a shortage of vaccine, and there will be a line around the block.”

“There were times when the vaccine was prioritized so that high-risk people got it first, and it was withheld for so long that the average person couldn’t get it for quite some time,” adds ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan.

Indeed, a new study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* highlights the [importance of flu vaccines](#) [2] for at least one susceptible population — young children. According to the study results, the vaccine helps lower the risk of contracting the flu among infants as young as nine months old. “There wouldn’t have been such a surplus of H1N1 vaccines left over if young children were getting vaccinated as they should have been. Approximately 20,000 kids under the age of five get hospitalized every year due to the flu, and this is a statistic we should be able to reduce drastically,” says Dr. Ross. “Parents must be told that the vaccine is safe for their infants and toddlers, and not to have them vaccinated is putting their lives at risk.”

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**Links**

[1] <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2010/11/24/>

[2] <http://www.latimes.com/health/boostershots/la-heb-flu-shots-children-20101126,0,2948102.story>