Influenza Vaccine-related Messaging: Public Perspective and Considerations

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Overview

• Focus on three facets of communication
  – Consumers (i.e., people we want to get an influenza vaccination)
  – Media (primarily news media)
  – Messages

• Most findings come from two 2006-07 surveys
  – Random digit dialed survey of 1,247 people
  – Web panel survey of 1,290 people
  – Both nationally representative samples using close-ended questions
Characteristics of Sample

- **Gender**
  - Of RDD respondents, 52% were female and 48% were male
  - Of Web respondents, 51% were female and 49% were male

- **Ethnicity**
  - Data are represented in pie charts
  - RDD:
    - 72% White (not Hispanic)
    - 11% Hispanic/Latino
    - 9% African-American (not Hispanic)
    - 8% Other
  - Web:
    - 66% White (not Hispanic)
    - 15% Hispanic/Latino
    - 12% African-American (not Hispanic)
    - 7% Other

- **Age**
  - Data were collected for four age brackets: 18–34, 35–54, 55–64, and 65+ years of age
  - Majority of respondents in both modalities were aged 18–54 (71% RDD, 69% Web)
Getting the Flu Shot—Current Season

- 43% of RDD and 36% of web panel respondents reported having gotten a seasonal flu shot this season.

- Among web panel respondents, Whites (41%) were more likely than Hispanics (21%) to have gotten the flu shot. However, among RDD respondents, there were no significant differences between any ethnic groups.

- For both modalities, respondents over the age of 65 were more likely (69% RDD, 73% Web) than any other age group to have gotten the flu shot.
Percentage Getting the Flu Shot-Last 5 Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RDD</th>
<th>Web</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every Year</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the Years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Question 1 – “True” or “False”

Most people believe they are very likely to get sick with influenza, with most people who believe this very likely to get an annual influenza vaccination.
Findings

• About a third of respondents believed it was very likely someone like themselves would get seasonal flu this year.

• Most people believed seasonal flu can lead to severe health consequences (76%).

• However, most respondents indicated no strong or significant concern about getting ill with seasonal flu (about 65% overall)
  – Females have greater concern than males
  – **Married individuals** have greater concern than single, with this being more pronounced in those 65 and older
  – Those with least concern were younger, single, and male.
Reasons for Not Getting the Flu Shot—Current Season

Most common reasons respondents are not planning to get a seasonal flu shot this season (check all that apply):

- Don't think I need it: 34%
- Shots make me sick: 13%
- Cannot afford it: 10%
- They don't work: 28%
- Don't think I need it: 60%
Reasons for Not Getting the Flu Shot—Last Year

• 56% of RDD respondents and 64% of Web respondents said they did not receive a shot last year

- Cannot afford it: 4% (Web), 11% (RDD)
- I did not have time: 6% (Web), 8% (RDD)
- Shots make me sick: 5% (Web), 9% (RDD)
- They don't work: 10% (Web), 24% (RDD)
- Don't think I need it: 32% (Web), 52% (RDD)
Question #2 – “True” or “False”

The majority of people discussed influenza vaccination with their physician or other health care professional this season.

• About a third said “yes”
• Just over half said “no”
• And about 15 percent said they did not see a physician or health care professional this flu season
Question 3 – “True” or “False”

The American public/consumers are, or would be, interested in learning more about influenza vaccine manufacturing processes and the complexities of influenza vaccine distribution.

Educating them about these would:
1) cause them to more strategically plan when to get their influenza vaccination; and
2) increase their willingness to come back to a health care provider two or three times for a flu vaccination.
Beliefs Regarding Preventive Measures
February 2007 Survey National Phone Survey (1203 adults)

When asked to list some things that they could do personally to help prevent the spread of a flu pandemic, respondents indicated the following four measures most frequently: washing hands, staying at home, maintaining good hygiene, and getting vaccinated. A substantial number of respondents indicated they do not know (18%).
“Good news” about influenza vaccine attracts more media interest and coverage than “bad news.”

[As assessed via a content analysis of about 23,000 media stories—primarily newspapers—for the time period October 1 to March 15, for each of the past four years.]
Seasonal Influenza
News Stories by Month and Year
2003 to 2007

n=22,908

Newspaper, wire services, press releases, select internet sites
The news media: 1) rarely tell people to get an influenza vaccination, 2) fail to tell people in January and February to get a flu vaccination, and 3) need to address myths and misperceptions regarding flu vaccine.
Seasonal Influenza News Messages by Week for 2003 – 2004: Top Ten Messages

- Flu Outbreak Reported
- Flu Information or symptoms
- Free Flu Vaccinations Offered/Given
- Child Death Reported
- Flu Season Arrived Early
- Doctors Recommend Flu Shot
- Flu Vaccine Shortage
- Date, time, location of vaccination clinics
- Flu kills 36,000 per year
- Increased Demand for Vaccine
Seasonal Influenza News Messages by Week for 2004 – 2005: Top Ten Messages

- Flu Vaccine Shortage
- High Risk - First Priority
- Vaccine Clinic for High Risk
- Fed/State/Local limits to High Risk
- Flu Vaccine Manufacturer License Suspended
- Amount of Vaccine Doses
- Flu Vaccine Cut in Half
- Call Hotline/See Website for Info.
- Date, time, location of Vaccination Clinic
- Healthy People Forgo Vaccination

- Date, time, location of Vaccination Clinic
- High Risk Group - First Priority
- Flu Vaccine Arrived, Available
- Call for Appointment/Information
- At Risk Over 50, 65+, Chronic Illness
- Amount of Vaccine Doses
- Enough Vaccine This Year
- Call Flu Hotline/See Website
- Flu Shot Offered/Given to High Risk
“5 Flu Myths Debunked”

- CNN and CNN.Com – March 22, 2007
- Five Myths addressed. . .
  - “You can catch a mild form of the flu from a flu shot.”
  - “Bed rest is really the only treatment for the flu.”
  - “You can only catch the flu in cold weather regions.”
  - “You must get the flu vaccine before December for it to be effective.”
  - “Flu is not a major health danger for healthy children over 5 years old.”
Question 6 – “True” or “False”

The strongest messages we could have regarding influenza vaccination are:

• “Everyone should get an annual vaccination.”
• “All children between 6 months and 18 years of age should receive an annual vaccination (unless medically contraindicated)
• “The more people who are vaccinated, the more people who are directly and indirectly protected from influenza.”
Question 7

The previous messages could be strengthened by:

• Specifying the groups of people that really benefit or benefit more from influenza vaccination
• Providing a detailed list of “priorities” as to who should receive vaccine when
• Stressing the need to use all or almost of the available vaccine supply to ensure the nation’s flu vaccine supplies stay high and continue to increase.
• Highlighting the health benefits of influenza vaccination, particularly for individuals and their families/loved ones as well as health care professionals.
“Flu Vaccine Could Prevent Heart Attacks”

• “A U.S. study has found a clear link between influenza outbreaks and deaths from heart disease. The risk of dying from a heart attack increased by a third during weeks when people were catching the flu, an investigation of more than 35,000 deaths found.”

• Findings were published this week in European Heart Journal, and reported by CBS News and London Times.

• Done by researchers at University of Texas in Houston.
“We know from our other research that one in three people with heart disease do not consider themselves at high risk for heart-related complications from influenza and therefore do not receive annual flu shots. Currently, people are not practicing as we preach, and doctors need to work to change this.”

Professor Mohammad Madjid
Lead investigator
Question 7 – “True” or “False”

There is a deep and broad willingness, commitment and ability to stand by a universal vaccination recommendation in the face of vaccine production or distribution delays, fewer doses being available than projected, and/or significant reductions in the amount of vaccine available.

e.g., “We are not going to prioritize,” “Everyone benefits from vaccination, and our recommendation remains that all people are eligible to receive it.”
Some Final Messaging Thoughts

• We seek to “prevent,” people seek to “avoid”
• We must be ever mindful that “Influenza viruses drift, influenza viruses shift, influenza viruses can cause ‘rifts’” (i.e., much that affects consumer interest and demand for vaccine is beyond our control)
  – When the virus arrives
  – The strains that cause illness
  – The match between vaccine strains and circulating viruses
Thank you