



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
November 20, 2011

"Flu Vaccine Needs Updating"

The flu season is upon us again, along with the panic pushing the latest flu vaccine. Previous flu seasons have documented the production of ineffective vaccines, massive multi-billion dollar financial windfalls for pharmaceutical companies and an inability to identify timely the actual circulating flu strain (mismatching). Flu is estimated to result in 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths per year but the latest flu strains have been mild in comparison. In 2009, experts concluded that, "There is insufficient evidence to indicate that flu vaccines reduce infection rates or mortality, even in the elderly." The swine flu vaccine of 2009-2010 disclosed that a staggering 40 million doses, worth about \$260 million, was written off as trash to be incinerated and another 30 million doses (about \$195 million) expired, meaning that about 43% of the vaccine was unused and a waste of almost one half billion dollars of tax payers' money. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), all Americans over six months of age should get a flu shot and in 2010, nearly 131 million people, or 43 percent of the U.S. population, received the influenza vaccine last season. In a study, published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal, Michael Osterholm, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Minnesota and colleagues screened 5,707 vaccine studies published in the last 40 years. They found that the most common flu vaccine in the United States is effective for 59 percent of healthy adults, well below the 70 percent to 90 percent level previously reported. These experts believe that the vaccines may be far less effective than thought and that there is a need for a new generation of flu shots, especially in the face of a future flu pandemic. The two groups most at risk from flu-related illness or death are the children and the adults over the age of 65 and these two groups also lack information as to how well the current vaccines work for them. The researchers limited their analysis to randomized controlled trial (the medical gold standard) or methods that did not have a "selection bias." Their meta-analysis of the 31 studies showed that a newer type of vaccine, that uses a live virus, was 83 percent effective in protecting children between six months and seven years old. However, it is curious that this type of vaccine, which is made by MedImmune, is not currently recommended as the best treatment for children by the CDC.

In the America that I love, we have seen the government "cry wolf," especially as it relates to the flu. Government-created scare tactics and gimmicks to entice you to cow-tow down to their unchallenged recommendations may be afoot. Be safe.

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