

Flu Vaccine Less Effective in Winter 2007/2008 than in Previous Winters.

A new Harris Poll confirms the findings of a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that the vaccine used to prevent the flu this last winter was less effective than the flu vaccines used in previous winters.

In three previous winters people receiving flu vaccines were 33 percent, 43 percent and 24 percent less likely to get the flu than people who did not get flu shots. This year, people who received flu shots were just as likely to get the flu as those who did not get flu shots. For reasons explained below, these results probably underestimate the effectiveness of flu shots. However, because the surveys conducted by Harris Interactive used identical methodologies, the difference between this winter and different years is very significant.

These data come from a Harris Poll in which 2,529 U.S. adults were surveyed online between April 7 and 15, 2008 by Harris Interactive.

One reason why the straight comparison of the incidence of flu of those who did and did not receive flu shots is not a solid measure of the vaccine's effectiveness is that those who are more likely to get the flu may also be more likely to get their flu shots. *The Harris Poll*® suggests that this happened. Fully 72 percent of people aged 65 and over – a high risk group – had flu shots, and 40 percent of people aged 50-64 did so. Less than 30 percent of adults under 50 did so. This could explain why people over 50 were less likely to get the flu than younger people.

Another reason why these should be treated with caution is that it is difficult for patients and physicians to make a certain diagnosis of flu, as there are other conditions that can produce similar symptoms. *For all these reasons it is the trends rather than precise percentages that are important.*

Other interesting findings in this survey by Harris Interactive include:

- Only 15 percent of people aged 50-64 and 65 and over reported getting the flu compared to 23 percent or more of the younger age groups;
- Although Hispanics were just as likely (36%) as the average for all Americans to get flu shots, they were much more likely to report having the flu (30%, compared to 19% for whites and 14% for African-Americans.);
- Gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals (GLBT) were as likely to get flu shots as heterosexuals, but were much more likely to report that they had the flu (33% compared to 19%);

- Only about half of the people (53%) reported having the flu visited a doctor who diagnosed flu. However, fully 78 percent of those who believe they had the flu say they are certain it was the flu;
- Thirty-eight percent of all adults think they will get a flu shot next winter. This compares with 36 percent who had flu shots for this past winter. Those planning to have flu shots include 89 percent of those who had shots last winter and only 10 percent of those who did not. Interestingly, those who had the flu are no more likely to say they will get flu shots next winter than those who did not get the flu.

A Note on the Data Released by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

The report of the CDC, published on April 17th, found that the flu viruses most prevalent this last winter turned out to be different than the viruses used in the vaccine. The report found that the vaccine used was somewhat effective in preventing the flu virus A (H3N2), a more virulent virus, but was completely ineffective against the Influenza B virus that circulated this past winter.

Table 1
Those Who Had Flu Shots and Those Who Got the Flu This Winter

“Thinking back to this winter just ending...
Did you get the flu this winter?
Did you have a flu vaccine shot before this winter?”

Base: All Adults

	March 2004	March 2005	April 2007	April 2008
	%	%	%	%
Percentage of all adults who had a flu shot before this winter	35	27	35	36
Percentage of all adults who got the flu this winter	18	21	15	20

Table 2
Demographics of Those Who Had Flu Shots and of Those Who Got the Flu

“Did you get the flu this winter?
Did you have a flu vaccine shot before this winter?”

Base: All Adults

	Had a Flu Shot	Got the Flu
	%	%
All Adults	36	20
Sexual Orientation		
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual	35	33
Heterosexual	36	19
Age		
18-24	19	24
25-29	23	25
30-39	27	23
40-49	28	23
50-65	40	15
65+	72	15
Race/Ethnicity		
White	38	19
African-American	30	14
Hispanic	36	30

Table 3
How Many of Those Who Got or Did Not Have Flu Shots Got the Flu?

“Thinking back to this winter just ending...
Did you get the flu this winter?
Did you have a flu vaccine shot before this winter?”

Base: All Adults

	March 2004	March 2005	April 2007	April 2008
	%	%	%	%
Percentage of all adults who had a flu shot who got the flu	14	13	13	21
Percentage of all adults who did not have flu shots who got the flu	21	23	17	20
How much less likely were people with flu shots to get the flu than those who were not vaccinated?	33	43	24	5

Table 4

The Experiences of Those Who Believe They Got the Flu After Having Had a Flu Shot

“Did you spend one or more days in bed with the flu?”
“Did you visit a doctor who diagnosed the flu?”
“How certain are you that you got the flu, and that it was not just a cough or a cold?”

Base: All adults who had a flu shot and believe they had the flu.

	March 2004	March 2005	April 2007	April 2008
	%	%	%	%
Spent one or more days in bed	79	85	74	78
Visited a doctor who diagnosed flu	51	53	39	53
Certain I got the flu	80	82	71	78

Table 5

Likelihood of Getting Flu Shot Next Winter

“Do you think you will or will not get a flu shot next winter?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Had Flu This Winter		Had Flu Shot This Winter	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%
Will get flu shot	38	39	39	89	10
Will not get flu shot	45	44	46	4	69
Not sure	16	17	15	6	22

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between April 7 and 15, 2008, among 2,529 adults (aged 18 and over) of whom 911 got a flu shot before the winter of 2007/2008. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at www.harrispollonline.com.

To Subscribe

Please visit www.harrisinteractive.com/newsletters

To Unsubscribe

Please send an email to newsletters@harrisinteractive.net or simply click on the "One-Click Unsubscribe" link in the footer of the email you received with this newsletter.

For more information, please contact us at:

877.919.4765

or visit our healthcare webpage at
www.harrisinteractive.com/healthcare

Media inquiries, contact:

Tracey McNerney 585.214.7756
tmcnerney@harrisinteractive.com