The Flu

VS.

The Flu Shot

Learning to overcome the perfect storm of flu season complacency so you can protect your workforce from an outbreak this flu season.

TOTALWELLNESS
Pick a Side!

As flu season rolls around, it seems that there are always two opposing sides. One side includes people who side with the flu shot. The other includes people who don't support the shot - we'll call them people who side with the flu.

In order to choose the healthiest side, it's important to understand why each side has emerged. Then you can analyze all the information, and take action to choose your side.

CONTENTS

The Perfect Storm 3
The Truth About The Flu 5
The Single Best Option 7
Siding With The Flu Shot 9
The Perfect Storm

There is a crazy amount of complacency when it comes to flu season. People don’t take a lot of action to avoid the flu. And it’s not because of any one factor.

A variety of things contribute to the public’s complacent attitude towards the flu. It’s the perfect combination of doubts, fears and misconceptions. Coupled with the unpredictability of the flu, it’s the perfect storm for widespread inaction.

MISINFORMATION

One major factor that plays a role in the widespread complacency is the large amount of misinformation being spread about the flu shot. Anyone can go online and find a “resource” to support their opinions. What breeds misinformation, however, is when those resources aren’t credible. So while many of the flu shot myths are rebuked by science, people still latch on to them and use that information to drive their decisions.

One example? Many people believe receiving the flu shot will give them the flu. This rumor is consistently circulating, regardless of the fact it’s simply not true. The flu shot is made either from an inactivated flu virus, or from proteins that don’t contain the virus at all. There is no way that the components of the flu shot can infect someone who receives it.

Many people believe these types of myths as truth—without doing any research about their plausibility. That contributes to a mistrust of the flu shot itself. It also leads to the idea that the flu shot is harmful or dangerous.

MISUNDERSTANDING

Another factor that contributes to flu season complacency is a misunderstanding of the flu in general. The public hasn’t fully grasped the serious nature of the flu virus.

Many people use the word “flu” in a generic sense of the term. If they’re feeling bad in late fall or winter, they assume they’ve gotten the flu. In reality, though, there are plenty of other illnesses that can make you feel bad in that time-frame.

While those things aren’t fun to deal with, they’re more manageable than the flu. The flu is caused by a specific virus—influenza. There are a variety of types of influenza. What makes it stand out from other, similar illnesses, however, is its high attack rates and its severity.

The flu spreads like wildfire every fall and winter. It is easily passed from one person to the next, and people tend to fall ill very suddenly—unlike a cold you can feel coming on. It will also likely put you out of commission for several days, and maybe up to a couple of weeks.

People assume any 24-hour bug is the flu. They think, “Yeah, that sucked. But it wasn’t THAT bad…and I recovered so quickly.” This misunderstanding leads people to misunderstand how serious the flu is. It leads people to think that the risk they face is small because the flu just isn’t that bad.
UNPREDICTABILITY

The only thing scientists can predict about the flu is that it's unpredictable. Its ability to change and mutate makes it very hard for scientists to say anything about it with high levels of confidence.

That unpredictability has made for a skeptical public—which contributes to complacency during flu season.

Just think about it. In recent years, we've witnessed sudden flu outbreaks that nobody saw coming. We've also heard warnings of severe flu seasons ahead that didn't quite pan out. We've even seen vaccine predications that were simply off the mark.

While these things are all due to the unpredictable nature of the flu, the public often views them as scientific errors. There's a mistrust of the experts in charge of flu prevention, and it can make people more willing to take their chances than to go get a flu shot that may or may not help them.

All of these things play a huge role in creating the perfect storm of flu complacency. They're strengthened by recent surges of trendy—but unfounded—anti-vax movements claiming vaccines cause autism.

Add on the fact that many people are afraid of needles, and you can see why the public opts for inaction.
The Truth About The Flu

The flu is serious business. It can be an illness that knocks you out of your regular routine for up to two weeks. Most of the time, there’s nothing you can do about it if you’re already ill.

The flu is characterized by a number of symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea

When you get the flu, you have a small window to get on antiviral medications if you’d like to help cut down its severity. Doctors usually only prescribe antivirals if you’ve come in within a day or two of contracting the virus—and they’re designed not to cure the flu, but to help you recover more quickly.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between three million and five million severe cases of the flu are reported each year, and between 250,000 and 500,000 deaths occur due to the flu each year.

That pain and suffering is accompanied by some huge economic burdens as well.

The flu causes a total of 111 million lost workdays every year, which is about $7 billion in lost productivity. Medical costs tack on another $10.4 billion each year. The total yearly economic burden from the flu is thought to exceed $87 billion.

But the flu doesn’t fight fair. Some people contribute to this economic burden more often than others. That’s because there are people at greater risk to have complications associated with the flu, which can cause more health problems and cost more money.
Those at-risk populations include:
- Children younger than 5 years old—but especially those younger than 2 years old
- Adults older than 65 years old
- Pregnant women
- Residents of nursing homes or other long-term care facilities
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- People who have medical conditions like: asthma, neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders, kidney disorders, liver disorders, metabolic disorders, weakened immune systems or extreme obesity

All of these people are much more likely to have complications if they get sick with the flu.

As a population, we can keep ourselves—and those at higher risk—healthy just by being vaccinated. That’s because the more people in a population who get the flu shot, the more immune the entire population will be.

Immunized people serve as a sort of “buffer.” Rather than spreading the flu when they come into contact with a sick person, they stop it. If a majority of the population gets vaccinated—everyone wins!
The Single Best Option

Not only can being vaccinated help us reach community immunity, but it is the single best way to protect yourself personally from the flu. Getting the flu shot is the best chance you have to avoid getting sick.

The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months old and older. If you’re in one of the higher-risk populations, it’s especially important to get a flu shot so you can avoid the flu and the complications you’re at risk for.

HOW IT WORKS

The flu vaccine is made up of inactivated, non-infectious versions of the flu virus. As is true with any vaccine, the goal is to expose you to just enough of the virus so that your body starts to develop antibodies—or good proteins in your body that identify and fight bad things like viruses and bacteria.

When you get the flu vaccine, your body will develop antibodies against the strains of the flu virus that have been included in the shot. That process can take about two weeks—which is why it’s important to get the vaccine before you start to notice your friends and coworkers getting sick.

The unpredictable nature of the influenza virus makes the flu vaccine a little unique. The flu virus often mutates, or changes what it’s made of. Each mutation results in a new strain of the flu. Each flu strain is just a little different than the others.

To be sure that the flu shot is as effective as possible, a group of scientists gets together each spring to try and figure out which flu strains will spread in the coming flu season. They look at previous flu seasons, as well as flu seasons in other regions throughout the world to see which strains are the most likely.

After they make their recommendations in the spring, flu shot manufacturers get to work. It can take months to make the amount of flu vaccine we need—which is why the recommendations are made so early in the year.
There are two primary types of flu shot when it comes to the virus strains they protect against. Trivalent flu shots protect against three strains of the flu shot, and quadrivalent flu shots protect against four strains. The quadrivalent shots include all three strains covered by the trivalent shot, plus an extra strain.

Here's a simple breakdown.

**Trivalent:**
- Most likely Influenza A strain
- 2nd most likely Influenza A strain
- Most likely Influenza B strain

**Quadrivalent:**
- Most likely Influenza A strain
- 2nd most likely Influenza A strain
- Most likely Influenza B strain
- 2nd most likely Influenza B strain

Quadrivalent shots clearly provide a wider coverage, but the two types of shots are fairly similar in their make. There are also a variety of different types of vaccine based on the process used to make them, how they're stored, and how they're administered to the public.

Ultimately, it's most important to remember that any protection is better than none at all. Any flu shot is an excellent option for staying healthy this flu season.
Siding With The Flu Shot

As the experts have learned more and more about the flu virus, they’ve been much more proactive about urging people to get the flu shot. As that conversation has become louder and louder, it’s become easier and easier to get the flu shot.

One way to make it even easier is to bring it into the workplace. Many American adults spend a majority of their waking hours at work. Meet them where they’re at and show them the importance of the flu shot by allowing them to get it right there in the office.

FLU SHOTS AT WORK

Many companies have begun to host worksite flu shot clinics in the fall—which can be an outstanding option to make the flu shot an easy choice for your employees. A worksite flu shot clinic really can be easy for the leadership team as well!

There are a variety of wellness service providers—like us—who can help you bring the flu shot into your workplace. In most cases, your only responsibilities are to secure a date and a room. We will come in and do the rest!

This type of worksite event is one of the best options for a few different reasons. First of all, it’s easy. There isn’t a ton of stress added to your plate. It also takes the burden and responsibility off your employees to go out and get the shot. All they have to do is set aside a few minutes, walk down the hall and receive their vaccine.

Offering the flu shot at work is also an awesome opportunity to take advantage of some positive peer pressure. Protecting your workforce means protecting your company during flu season. It’s in your favor as a company to have as many employees as possible protected from the flu.

If people see their coworkers headed to the flu shot clinic, they’ll be reminded to do the same. They might even feel less apprehension or fear of the needle stick if they’re not alone. You can also recruit a few wellness champions to directly encourage coworkers to hop on board and head to the flu shot clinic.

Finally, bringing the flu shot into the workplace helps you let your employees know you care about them. As beneficial as it can be for your company, in the end it’s still one way to protect each individual employee from getting sick during flu season. Looking out for your employees like that lets them know they’re important to you—which can really boost job satisfaction and workforce morale.

If you can’t bring a flu shot clinic to your workplace, you have other options to make the flu shot an easy choice for your employees. You could consider offering flu shot vouchers. Your employees can download their voucher and head to a local pharmacy to get their shot taken care of.
EDUCATE YOUR EMPLOYEES

Making the flu shot easy for your employees is an exceptional first step to siding with the flu shot during flu season. No matter how easy you make it, though, employees won’t take advantage if they’re skeptical of the shot itself.

Remember the perfect storm we talked about earlier?

There are lots of things that contribute to the misconceptions your employees hold about the flu and flu shot. If you want them to stay healthy by actually getting the flu shot, you’ll need to get through to them with correct, evidence-based information about flu season.

That means taking some time to de-bunk the myths, answer questions and provide resources for your employees. Give them everything they need to make the right choice.

PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

You can very strongly encourage your employees to get the flu shot simply by leading by example. Take the extra time to make sure your wellness team and your corporate leadership are on board. If employees see these people getting the flu shot, it can serve as the little bit of extra motivation they need.

Practicing what you preach also helps you avoid mixed signals. If you promote your corporate flu shot clinic, but then don’t get the flu shot yourself, you’re just asking for doubt and skepticism. Your employees won’t trust that it’s something valuable and will probably feel pretty poorly about your wellness strategy.

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

All of these things can be lumped into one common theme—take flu season seriously. The perfect storm of factors has created a sense of complacency and inaction when it comes to the flu shot. People just don’t care or understand flu season as a serious challenge.

You can either contribute to or fight against that sense of complacency with the attitude you take. Flu season is a serious problem for individuals in our country—but also for our healthcare system and our economy. We have a solution—the flu shot—that is seriously overlooked because of incorrect beliefs and misinformation.

Take some serious steps to address the problem, side with the flu shot and contribute to proactive protection against the flu this flu season.
Welcome to the Healthy Side!

If you're interested in siding with the flu shot this flu season, we'd love to talk with you! Give us a call to learn how the flu shot can work where you work, as well as tips for flu shot communication and promotion among your workforce.

To get in touch with an Account Executive, click here.

To get a flu shot price quote, click here.

To learn more about flu shots from TotalWellness, click here.

We wish you the best of luck protecting yourself and your workforce from the flu this year. Side with the flu shot, and stay happy and healthy!

Get Connected!

TOTALWELLNESS

TotalWellnessHealth.com
888.434.4358