CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ADULT INFLUENZA VACCINATION

Campaign Overview: United States

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Executive Summary

The United States influenza awareness campaign is a sophisticated, mature and resource rich program with sustained efforts made by government, patient organisations and the wider civil society community.

The US campaign is the good example of how to extensively promote influenza vaccination without the basis of universal influenza vaccination program. Although annual influenza vaccination is recommended for all people aged 6 months and over, the influenza vaccine is covered by private health insurance plans and the government-funded program is only eligible for adults aged 65 years and over (Medicare Part B).

CDC is leading the national influenza awareness campaign and has developed a great deal of communication resources including web assets, fact sheets, infographics, posters, videos, podcasts, social media toolkits, news releases and so on. All materials are downloadable, shareable, and some of them are customizable to assist partners in spreading the messages to promote the awareness of influenza vaccination.

Although there has been an emphasis on universal communication for all people aged 6 months and older, CDC is still committed to reaching high-risk people influenza, including older people and adults with chronic disease, by creating targeted informative and education materials.

As a complementary part of government campaign, a lot of patients organizations and advocacy groups are rolling out targeted campaigns and sharing tailored messages to inform their members and constitutes about the seriousness of influenza and the importance of vaccination.
Demographic Details

The United States (US), in 2018, had an estimated population of 327.2 million with 18.7% (61.2m) under the age of 15 years and 15.8% (51.7m) aged 65 years and over. By 2050, there will be 86.5 million people aged 65 years and older (22.4% of the total population) compared with 64.1 million (16.6%) under the age of 15 years.

Parallel to pace of population ageing is the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in the United States. In 2016, 88% of all deaths were attributable to NCDs, with cardiovascular disease (CVD) representing the leading cause, followed by cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes. In addition to its life altering impact, the economic costs of NCDs are staggering with an estimated $94.9 trillion from 2015 to 2050, both in terms of lost productivity and health care expenses.

Context

Influenza is a serious, life-threatening infection for older adults who have a weakened immune system and equally so for those with chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, asthma and diabetes. It is reported that approximately 50% - 70% of hospitalizations and 90% of deaths due to influenza occurred in people aged 65 years and older during most seasons.

In the recent influenza season, 37% of older Americans were not vaccinated and according to survey from the National Council on Ageing, many underestimate the seriousness of influenza and are largely unaware of their vaccine options.

To raise public attention on the importance of influenza vaccination, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has an awareness campaign during the National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) and throughout the year. A variety of messages reminding the public to be vaccinated are disseminated through posters, news releases, animated images as well as web badges.

Patient and advocacy associations including the American Heart Foundation, American Lung Association, AARP, National Council on Aging and the Immunization Action Coalition are actively responding and participating in the influenza awareness campaign by creating customized influenza-related messages and promotional materials targeting their constituents.

Government Campaign

Adult Immunisation Schedule

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is responsible for recommendations on the use of vaccines for effective control of vaccine preventable diseases. This includes the target populations, timing and dosage of the vaccine.

The recommendations and corresponding immunisation schedule is an official guide for health care providers and vaccine recipients and provides the basis for the inclusion of vaccines in private health insurance plans and government-funded programs for eligible adults (e.g. Medicare Part B for adults 65 years and over).

Invitation letter

CDC has a vast array of educational materials for health care providers, as well as civil society and consumers. Customizable letters that can be used by health care professionals (e.g. doctors) to invite those most at-risk for influenza, including old people and patients with asthma, diabetes, heart disease or other chronic medical conditions to be vaccinated. Individuals aged 65 years and...
over are informed of the vaccine options including the standard and enhanced influenza vaccines the latter developed especially for those most at-risk of serious complications.

Figure 2: Invitation Letter

Mr. Mrs. Mrs.,

you are at high risk for flu complications

(this means if you get the flu, you are more likely to be seriously ill) because you have ...

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Other chronic medical condition(s)
- Or are 65 years or older

As your doctor, I recommend that you:

- Get a flu vaccine every year, as soon as vaccine is available. While everyone 6 months of age and older should get an annual flu vaccine, it’s especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications. High risk patients are recommended to receive the flu shot, not the nasal spray flu vaccine.
- Ask family and caregivers to get a flu vaccine to protect you.
- If you’re 65 years or older, you should get either a regular flu shot, a high-dose flu shot, or an adjuvanted flu shot. The latter two are designed especially for people in your age group. You should not get the nasal spray flu vaccine.

Find information about the different flu vaccines and who are approved for at https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/keyfacts.htm.

Flu vaccines are offered in many locations. Even if you don’t have a regular doctor or nurse, you can get your flu vaccine at a health department, pharmacy, urgent care clinic, and maybe your school, college health center, or work.

* There are some people who should not get a flu vaccine. For instance, people who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine or any of its components in the past. For more information about who should and who should not get vaccinated, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/whoshouldsh.htm.

Web page

The CDC website provides the most up-to-date information on vaccine recommendations as well as comprehensive knowledge on the influenza illness and complications.11,12

Through the website, which is constantly updated, the importance of vaccination in at-risk groups is described in easy to understand language with an emphasis on possible flu-related complications and age-specific vaccines for certain groups.13

Digital tools such as web buttons and badges that contain links to CDC information have been created to facilitate the reproduction of information.14

Brochure

The “Flu & You” brochure presents facts on influenza as well as the recommendations for fighting influenza.13 It describes common symptoms, warning signs, serious complications and consequences, transmission and duration of influenza, which is then followed by a three-step approach to fight influenza with vaccination being a priority.

Figure 3: Brochure

CDC Recommends a Three-Step Approach to Fight Flu:

1. Stay healthy! Manage stress, get enough sleep, eat well, and get regular exercise.
2. Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.
3. Get vaccinated and practice healthy habits like cleaning your hands.

Flu Symptoms can include:

- Sudden fever and chills
- Headache
- Body aches
- Runny nose or stuffy nose
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Wheezing or breathing difficulty

How long does a sick person spread flu to others?

Most people are contagious from one to two days before they show symptoms of flu. That time ends about one day after their symptoms begin. This means that people are contagious before they show symptoms of flu and even after they get better. People who have a flu illness can spread it to others four to six days after their symptoms begin. That is why it is so important to get vaccinated.

Fact sheet

“No More Excuses: You Need a Flu Vaccine” aims to dispel the myths and doubts about influenza vaccine.16 It brings attention to the value of influenza vaccination in healthy people and reiterates vaccine safety. Although this fact sheet is directed to the general public, messages about serious complications for at-risk groups is highlighted.

“Who Should Get It, and Who Should Not” explains the differences between the flu shot and nasal spray flu vaccine to better inform consumers the most appropriate vaccine based on their health conditions and age.16 Enhanced vaccines are recommended for older Americans. Specific to older people and people living with chronic diseases, fact sheets provide targeted information that the stress dangers of influenza infection and the value and safety of vaccine.
Informational posters are another medium that reminds both the general public and those who are at-risk of the serious nature and life-threaten consequences of influenza.

The posters intended for the general audience feature common messages that “Even healthy people can get flu and it can be serious” and “everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine.”

For older adults, poster messages focus on the benefits and safety of immunisation and availability of publicly covered vaccine under Medicare.

Posters designed for the National Influenza Immunization Week (NIIVW)\textsuperscript{17} carry the message that as long as the flu virus is circulating it’s not too late to be vaccinated.

Infographic

Infographics use facts, figures, and animations to display facts about influenza and vaccination. The reasons why annual influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older are explained in terms of the seriousness of infection and the individual and population-level benefits (reduce mortality). The call to action is for everyone 6 months or older to be vaccinated against influenza.\textsuperscript{18}

Image and GIF

Animated images and GIFs designed to attract attention to different age cohorts and at-risk populations promote the value of influenza vaccination.\textsuperscript{19,20} Shared by CDC through various social media such as Facebook and Twitter the images have a far reaching effect in providing a snapshot of vaccination benefits while encouraging readers to be vaccinated.
The image targeting at-risk individuals with heart disease features a message that “flu vaccination has been shown to lower rates of some cardiac events in people with heart disease.”

Figure 6: Social Media Image

Video

Videos produced by CDC aim to communicate the value of influenza vaccination and address questions and misconceptions about the disease and vaccination.21

“#HowIRecommend” is a series of short, informative videos from clinicians explaining the importance of vaccination, how to effectively address questions from patients about safety and effectiveness, and how to persuade patients to be vaccinated.22 Targeting the growing population of older Americans Dr Pamela Tockwell describes her exchanges with older patients and the reasons for being vaccinated against influenza.23

Podcast

Podcasts share expert recommendations on influenza prevention.24 “A Cup of Health with CDC” series is a weekly podcast from the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, brought to listeners by Dr. Erin Kennedy who discusses the importance of an annual flu vaccination for at-risk groups including young children; pregnant women; older people (over 65 years) and those with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.

Public Service Announcement

Public service announcements (PSAs) containing information, guidance and recommendations from CDC experts on important aspects of flu prevention and the flu season aim to raise the awareness of influenza.25 The announcements comprising texts and animations are presented in the form of videos to encourage everyone six months and older to be proactive in influenza immunisation.

Press conference

CDC, along with the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) held a press conference on 26 September 2019 to officially launch the 2019-2020 flu vaccination campaign.26 Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar, and CDC Influenza Division Director Dr. Dan Jernigan received their flu shot at the conference. Dr. Jernigan took questions from the media and emphasized that it was now time for everyone 6 months and older to have their flu shot. Secretary Azar encouraged Americans to use the hashtag #WhyIFightFlu this season and to talk about why they are vaccinated.

News release

News release are routinely used by the CDC to announce new and noteworthy influenza-related events, research, message to the public. For example, the article released post the NFID and CDC press conference stresses the benefits of influenza vaccine and provides a guidance to audiences on age-specific vaccines.27

On evidence of the correlation between age and influenza-related complications, hospitalizations and deaths, the CDC recommends the use of high-dose influenza vaccines for persons aged 65 years and older.28

The matte article published for the National Influenza Vaccination Week contains a call to action on influenza vaccination for the general public and especially those at-risk of influenza-related complications.29

Vaccine Information Statement

The Vaccine Information Statement (VIS) is an information sheet produced by the CDC explaining the benefits and risks of the vaccine.30 It provides information about the specific risks of influenza in at-risk groups to be shared with caregivers and family members who have not been vaccinated.
Non-government Organizations

**AARP**

AARP represents over 38 million older Americans and plays a critical role in educating members and promoting the value of influenza vaccination through press releases, videos and news broadcasts.

**Press release**

“Vaccines You’ll Need After 50” is a press release that sends the message that influenza vaccination is for all Americans no matter what their age but most particularly those over 65 years of age who are one of the groups most vulnerable to influenza-related hospitalization and sometimes death.31

The serious impact of influenza infection on the functional ability of older people is elaborated in the news article “Medical Experts Advise: Get Your Flu shot”, where influenza is described as the “first domino in progressive decline” for those who are frail and older.32

**Video**

Videos produced by AARP educate older adults on how to protect themselves and strengthen their defenses to avoid influenza infection. One of the recommendations is to talk with their doctor about the enhanced vaccine recommended for older people.33,34

**News broadcast**

“AARP Live Minutes” in partnership with RFD-TV is a segment highlighting particular issues of interest to older people. During a broadcast in the October viewers were urged to have their flu shot early and reminded those over 65 years of age should consider the recommended enhanced vaccine.35

**National Council on Aging**

In 2016, the NCOA collaborated with an industry partner to produce the "Flu + You" campaign to educate older adults and their families about the seriousness of influenza, the importance of the annual flu vaccination, and the vaccine options. A variety of campaign materials were created to foster the circulation of key messages to older Americans including fact sheets, infographics and posters.

**Fact sheets**

The NCOA has produced fact sheets reflecting study results about the knowledge level and attitude of influenza in adults aged 65 years and over. In large part the seriousness of influenza was greatly underestimated, and respondents were largely unaware of the various vaccine options.

Frequently asked questions such as when/where/how to be vaccinated, and whether vaccination will cause influenza were addressed through a detailed fact sheet as were misconceptions about influenza and vaccination.

**Poster and infographic**

Posters and infographics are other mediums for communication used by the NCOA to improve the uptake rates of vaccination. For instance, infographics are used to illustrate that influenza may lead to medical visits and hospitalization and worsen underlying chronic conditions (e.g. heart disease and diabetes), and that the enhanced vaccine is recommended for older adults.36
The poster featured happy, healthy older people from different cultures along with the reminder “talk with your health care providers about their flu vaccine options to maintain your health”.

Blog

“Healthy Aging In Winter and Beyond: 4 Important Vaccines for Seniors Covered by Medicare” is a blog to introduce vaccines to older people. The article answers five influenza-related questions including what is influenza, why it is important for older adults to receive the flu shot, when/where they should be vaccinated and how and for whom can the cost be covered by Medicare.

Immunization Action Coalition

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) works to increase immunization awareness and facilitate communication about the safety, efficacy and use of vaccines by creating and distributing educational materials for health care professionals and the general public.

Web page

The IAC website contains a body of resource rich information on vaccines and vaccine preventable diseases (VPD) organized by age groups to help readers understand the impact, the vaccines recommended and vaccine safety.

A clear and consistent message throughout the site is that “influenza is most dangerous for people with health conditions such as heart and lung disease, the very young and very old, and pregnant women” and “vaccination is the most effective step you can take to be protected from this serious disease”.

Fact sheet

A set of fact sheets produced by IAC outlines vaccines recommended for people in different age groups and with different health conditions.

The fact sheet (translated into Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, and French) intended for all adults states that a single-dose influenza vaccine is recommended every fall (or winter) for self-protection and the protection of people around you.

American Heart Foundation

Web page

The American Heart Foundation (AHF) provides information on their web site about “Flu and Pneumonia Prevention” with a detailed description of the special problems that influenza poses for people with cardiovascular disease and the critical importance of the annual influenza vaccine.

News release

News releases are also used to update patients about the danger of influenza and the importance of vaccination. Various communications focus on the relationship between influenza and certain heart diseases, as well as the benefits and effectiveness of the influenza vaccine in reducing all-cause and cardiovascular deaths.

American Lung Association

The American Lung Association (ALA) implements various awareness raising actions to improve the understanding of its members on the importance of influenza vaccination.

The “Faces of Influenza” campaign promote influenza vaccination through a public education initiative urging families to be vaccinated as soon as possible. The most recent campaign focused on collecting and displaying portraits of many famous and not-so-famous Americans, who are committed to the preventative action of influenza vaccination to help stop the spread of influenza.

"MyShot" was a campaign that reinforced the serious consequences of influenza and the need to be protected by being vaccinated early. This message was promoted across multiple channels including websites, newsletters and physician waiting rooms across the country.

Web page

The Association is working to increase the awareness of its constituents about influenza prevention through up to date information on the website such as influenza causes, risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention and treatment. The association between influenza and other chronic
lungs such as pneumonia and asthma is clearly explained along with a call-to-action as one of the medical tips for patients to keep their lungs healthy.\cite{45,46,47}

In support of the MyShot campaign, a special website was created (GetMyShot.org) to help people 50 years of age and older and their caregivers access information and resources that explain the need to take the flu seriously every year.\cite{48} Online communications focus on the potential dangers of flu, how the flu can have direct and indirect effects on chronic conditions, and the need to prioritize vaccination. There is also a guide for patients on how to talk with health care providers about which vaccine options may be right for them.\cite{49}

**Case stories**

To increase awareness and discussion about the serious impact of flu in older adults, particularly those with chronic health conditions, the MyShot campaign shares patients and health care providers personal stories detailing why they prioritize a flu shot.\cite{50} These stories were presented by video and text to illustrate the potential impact of flu on vulnerable groups (severe illness, worsening of chronic health conditions, hospitalization and leading to missed workdays).

**Press release and blog**

Press releases and blogs are also used by the Association to inform members about the danger of influenza and the importance of annual vaccinations.\cite{51,52,53,54} All news articles convey a call to action to encourage readers to take influenza vaccination seriously as it is not only a lifesaving and healthy strategy but also protects those around them.
## Status of National Influenza Vaccination Campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Development Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehensive policies and programs</strong></td>
<td>Influenza vaccination is recommended by government and advisory bodies for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic diseases. Influenza vaccination is funded under the National Immunization Program (NIP) and administered through the state program for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic disease.</td>
<td>Well-developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clear communication strategy</strong></td>
<td>Published context-specific communication strategy and action plan which defines communication goals, target audiences, expected roles of partner organizations, communication tools and timeline.</td>
<td>Partially developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Well-defined audience</strong></td>
<td>Universal message distributed to undifferentiated populations (general audiences regardless of age and underlying health condition). Dedicated and tailored information for specific at-risk audience.</td>
<td>Partially developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple tools and channels</strong></td>
<td>Online communication such as web content, digital technology, social media, online publications, email. Messages are disseminated offline by TV, radio, printout (e.g. leaflet, poster, brochure, outdoor ads). Interactive communication including individual consultation, street campaign and face-to-face mobilization.</td>
<td>Well-developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realistic timeline</strong></td>
<td>Timely flu season alert and vaccination reminder. National/regional events scheduled for intensive awareness campaign such as national vaccination day/week/month.</td>
<td>Partially developed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regular updates of information</strong></td>
<td>Information is updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent evidence and policy, such as recommending newly licensed vaccines for specific recipient.</td>
<td>Well-developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement and support of civil society</strong></td>
<td>Communication on influenza by patient associations, ageing organizations and advocacy groups.</td>
<td>Partially developed</td>
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Legend: [Well-developed] [Partially developed] [Not yet developed / No evidence]
References


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