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Flu Behaviors and Treatments Survey National Results

On the heels of the 2012-13 flu season, which hit harder and earlier than it had in a decade, the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) conducted the Flu Behaviors and Treatments survey to understand public attitudes, experiences, and knowledge about flu prevention and treatment. State specific results are available for [Alabama](#), [Florida](#), [Georgia](#), [Illinois](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New York](#), [North Carolina](#), [Ohio](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Texas](#).

Many understand the importance of annual flu vaccination but aren't following through:

- Almost all respondents (93%) consider the flu to be a serious condition.
- While two-thirds (66%) of those surveyed know that people should be vaccinated against the flu each year, only 43% are very likely to get a flu vaccine this upcoming flu season.
- Just over one-fourth (27%) would call a doctor for advice when someone in the household has the flu.

Misperceptions hinder flu control efforts:

Individuals incorrectly believe that...
Washing your hands is the best way to protect against the flu (88%)
A flu vaccine can give you the flu (45%).
There are no prescription medicines to treat the flu (42%).
Getting a flu shot will treat the flu (18%).
Flu is most often spread by touching surfaces that have been touched by someone with the flu (44%).

According to the CDC...

An annual flu vaccination is the best way to protect against the flu.

A flu shot cannot cause flu illness.

Prescription antiviral medicines can treat the flu.

A flu shot helps to prevent flu. Antibodies against the flu take two weeks to develop. Get vaccinated early!

Flu is most often spread from another person when they sneeze, cough, or talk.

Overall, a majority are unaware that flu can be treated:

- A majority (59%) do not know or do not think there are prescription medicines for the flu (24% don't know; 35% don't think they exist).
- On average, survey respondents correctly answered only three out of seven questions about prescription antiviral medicines. The most common unknown facts among two-thirds to three quarters of respondents, included:
 - Antiviral medicines may make you less likely to pass the flu on to others (76% did not know)
 - Antiviral medicines help stop the flu virus from spreading in your body (69% did not know)
 - Antiviral medicines attack the flu virus at its source (67% did not know)

Other misperceptions include:

- Many (41%) don't realize that flu is contagious before symptoms start.
- More than two out of three (69%) surveyed think they know the difference between cold and flu symptoms; however when provided with a list of symptoms, they only correctly identified half (five out of 10) of symptoms associated with flu.
- Despite sudden onset being a hallmark symptom of flu that distinguishes it from a cold, only 37% correctly identified it as a flu symptom.

Demographic Insights**Women are more concerned about the flu and more likely to know the symptoms:**

- Women (28%) are more likely than men (20%) to be very concerned about getting the flu themselves or someone else in their household getting the flu.
- Women (76%) are more likely than men (63%) to believe that they can correctly identify the differences between cold and flu symptoms.

People age 55 and older are less concerned about the flu and more likely to get vaccinated:

- People age 55 and older (17%) are less likely to be very concerned about getting the flu themselves or someone else in their household getting the flu than those under the age of 55 (28%).
- Those 55 and older (61%) are more likely to get vaccinated than people under the age of 55 (35%), which may explain why they are less concerned about getting the flu.
- Those 55 and older (32%) are less likely to have had the flu in the past three years than people under 55 (54%).
- People age 55 and older (15%) are less likely to incorrectly think that prescription antibiotics fight the flu virus compared to those under the age of 55 (46% incorrectly think prescription antibiotics fight the flu virus).

Hispanics report the highest rates of flu, yet are less informed about symptoms and treatment:

- Hispanics (59%) report they have had the flu in the past three years, compared to 48% of African Americans and 42% of Caucasians.
- Despite having the highest reported rates of the flu in the past three years, Hispanics (61%) are the least likely to indicate they know the difference between cold and flu symptoms, compared to 67% of African Americans and 74% of Caucasians.
- More than half (54%) of Hispanics incorrectly think that prescription antibiotics fight the flu virus, compared to 24% of Caucasians. However, even more African-Americans (68%) share the same misconception.
- Hispanics (65%), have the most difficult time followed by African-Americans (59%) and Caucasians (51%) when deciding whether or not to go to work, school or to other commitments.

African-Americans are more concerned about the flu and more likely to see a doctor:

- More African-Americans (40%) than Hispanics (37%) or Caucasians (17%) are very concerned about getting the flu themselves or someone else in their household getting the flu.
- African-Americans (70%) are more likely to view the flu as being very serious compared to Hispanics (43%) and Caucasians (34%).

- If sick with the flu, African-Americans (54%) are more likely than Hispanics (38%) or Caucasians (34%) to call or see a doctor.
- African-Americans (42%) are more likely than Hispanics (33%) or Caucasians (19%) to say finding child or elder care is challenging.

Regional Insights

Northeasterners and Southerners are more likely to be concerned about the flu:

- People who live in the Northeast and the South (37% and 29%, respectively) are more likely to be very concerned about getting the flu themselves or someone else in their household getting the flu, compared to 17% in the West and 11% in the Midwest.
- Those who live in the South (50% compared to 40% in the Northeast, 35% in the West and 33% in the Midwest) are more likely to view the flu as very serious.
- Those who live in the Northeast and South (39% and 38%, respectively, compared to 25% in the Midwest and 24% in the West) are more likely to think it is “very important” to see a doctor immediately.
- Southerners are more likely to have called or seen a doctor when they have had the flu (45%) compare to 39% in the Northeast, 32% in the West and 26% in the Midwest.

About the Flu Behaviors and Treatments survey

The Flu Behaviors and Treatments survey was conducted by Research Now, which has an opt-in online consumer panel with approximately 3 million members. National survey findings are based on an online survey with a sample of 1,000 adults, 18 years and older. Individual state surveys were conducted with samples of 500 adults in each of the 10 states surveyed. Survey data was collected between August 6 and 28, 2013. Responses were weighted by demographic variables including sex, age, ethnicity, geographic region and education to ensure that the final samples approximate U.S. Census data nationally and for the individual states included. Read the press release [here](#).

The Flu Behaviors and Treatments survey is supported by Genentech, a member of the Roche Group.

About the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID)

NFID is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1973 and dedicated to educating the public and healthcare professionals about the causes, treatment, and prevention of infectious diseases. For more information, visit www.nfid.org.

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