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H3N2 influenza vaccine rates and other protective behaviours amongst college students

Narveen Jandu
Gannon University, USA

Influenza infections can result in seasonal outbreaks and epidemics in the USA. The 2014-2015 influenza outbreak was attributed to the H3N2 influenza A strain. This outbreak was partly attributed to the mismatch between the causative H3N2 influenza A strain and the annual influenza vaccine. The aim of this study was to determine if the mismatch between the causative influenza strain and the vaccine impacted vaccine rates or other protective health behaviours amongst college students. In this study, an online survey was used to determine the rate the influenza vaccination rates and any changes in student hygienic behaviours during the 2014-2015 influenza season amongst college students. Survey responses were collected from Jan. 15, 2015 to Feb. 15, 2015, and elicited 265 responses from undergraduate students. The total vaccine rate among respondents was 23%, but compared to the previous year (2013-2014) the overall vaccination rate among respondents decreased by 10%. Regardless of vaccination, 53% of total respondents reported a 'slight change' or 'more' in the protective health behaviour of hand-washing. The influenza vaccination rate amongst college students is within the range of the national CDC vaccination rate of 31% for this age group. The decrease in vaccination rates from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015 was consistent with the mismatch between the influenza strain and vaccine targets. Beyond vaccination, protection against influenza also involves enhanced personal and hand-hygiene behaviours. Such behaviours are very important on a college campus due to close living conditions and other social and casual behaviours.

jandu001@gannon.edu

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