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H3N2 influenza vaccine rates and other protective behaviors amongst college students

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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 behaviors amongst college students. In this study, an online survey was used to determine the influenza vaccination rates and any changes in student hygienic behaviors 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 behavior 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 behaviors. Such behaviors are very important in a college campus due to close living conditions and other social and casual behaviors.

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