A Recommendation Report to Help Increase Student Vaccinations at Indiana University

Indiana University Health

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Executive Summary

Graduates of Indiana University are afforded the reputation of being well-rounded and hardworking individuals. This reputation is earned by balancing school, work, and a social life while an undergraduate. In following the first line of Indiana University Health Center’s website, “In college, there's just not enough time to be sick,” we believe the health of Indiana University students is of paramount importance.

As students currently managing a rigorous school-work-life balance at Indiana University, we recognized both the importance of receiving flu shots and the lack of students being immunized. Our research is intended to mitigate the number of students not currently immunized for the flu virus.

At Indiana University, only half of the students surveyed reported an intention on receiving a flu shot. The best option for students is to be immunized by the IU Health Center, costing them at least $27 on top of the thousands an IU education costs. The severity of the issue is not increased size of IU’s student body, where the flu can easily spread to hundreds, causing students to break under the weight of their demanding schedules.

Our research led to the following recommendations:

1) Coordinate a competition with Greek life
2) Begin competition among Greek organizations
3) Organize pop-up flu shot stations
4) Award the winning fraternities/sororities

It is our firm belief that these recommendations will help the IU Health Center solve this issue. Implementing these recommendations in a timely fashion will prevent unnecessary illnesses and keep students in class.
Introduction

Our group consists of four undergraduate students at Indiana University. Our relationship with Indiana University allows us to understand how important attending class is and how easily a class can be missed by being sick. At Indiana University, students have busy schedules that do not allot time for being sick.

Last year, “Flu Season” ran from October to May, hospitalized over 600,000 people and claimed the lives of over 60,000 people. According to data from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, only 46% of college students reported they typically get the annual flu vaccination. We conducted research to evaluate this problem at Indiana University and, unfortunately, the numbers are just as poor.

Currently, IU Health Centers provide low-cost flu shots to students who want them. However, there is an alarming disparity between the number of students attending IU Bloomington and the number of those students receiving the flu shots. This results in needlessly sick students and community. Our recommendations are intended to encourage Indiana University students to get vaccinated. We believe that more can be done to effectively influence Indiana University students into receiving necessary vaccinations.

This report will go into further detail about the problem of the low immunization number at Indiana University and how this issue can be addressed. This paper contains the following sections:

- Problem in Detail - Defines the issue and uncovers the causes.
- Methods and Scope - Details the process and breadth of our research.
- Solutions - Offers our best options to mitigate the current issue.
- Recommendations - Outlines the necessary steps to implement our solution.
The Problem in Detail

What is the problem?

At Indiana University, 92 participants were surveyed, and it was recorded that only 17% of students were vaccinated for influenza, while another 33% reported that they plan on receiving the vaccination. Then we are left with that an average 50% of students who did not receive, or even intend on receiving, any form of vaccination to prevent the influenza virus. This statistic is frustrating knowing just over 52% of these students believe that the flu vaccination is necessary. With a large amount of people in such a small area, the virus can spread like wildfire. Missing a few days in college due to an illness can snowball into a workload that students spend the rest of the semester trying to overcome.

During flu season, which the CDC reports as “the beginning of fall until the beginning of spring”, a typical class will see an increase in absences due to students who are overtaken by the flu. An increase in vaccinations throughout the campus can lead to a system referred to as, “herd immunity.” As the NFID puts it, “it is the protection of unvaccinated individuals from a particular disease due to immunity that exists in the majority of the population, usually because of high vaccination rates.” With less of the population getting infected, class attendance will ultimately increase during the flu season months due to herd immunity. This will greatly help students as they will not miss as much class time and be behind in their studies. With a simple trip to the health center, this can be achieved.

The flu shot is accessible to any Indiana University student through the IU Health Center. According to the Indiana University Health Center, “Any Indiana University student can get a
flu vaccination for $27.00-$38.00 dollars depending on if that student has paid their health fee. A typical appointment lasts approximately 15 minutes.” Furthermore, IU does provide additional sessions to receive a vaccination. These dates and include October 15th, 23rd, 24th, and November 11th. The times for these events typically fall between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

What is the cause?

It is much easier for a student to focus on their studies and class scores when they are not trying to battle sickness. All these benefits make it apparent that most students would favor getting a yearly vaccine. While there could be thousands of different reasons why students choose not to receive a vaccination, through our research we found a few possibilities that are more common. While a large percentage of our survey group chose “other” we were able to find that a small portion, around 7%, found the vaccinations too costly. Although this is a small percentage for 92 surveyed, it may be something of interest to look into. Additionally, we found that 17% of the students surveyed simply do not like needles. This could also be looked into if the IUHC could receive nasal spray as well as needles for their vaccinations to improve vaccination numbers.

The biggest hindrance for students not getting a vaccine, according to our research, was that many individuals are too busy or getting the vaccination is not convenient for them. From our survey, we learned that 25% of students fall under this category. College students can lead a very busy schedule that does not leave much room for activities that may not seem that important to them. Part of this reasoning may be contributed to the lack of knowledge of the benefits that the vaccination can offer. When the students do not think it is important they do not place it as a priority in their agendas and it likely gets forgotten. With only 51% of participants believing it is necessary, the data shows that students are not properly informed and educated on the flu vaccination.
Methods and Scope

Why Flu Shots?

We decided to make this recommendation to improve the number of students that get their flu shot each year because college students have an increased risk of attracting the influenza virus. This risk is increased by walking to class in the cold as well as living in close quarters with others. Additionally, when a student is sick and forced to be absent from class it has a negative effect on their education. Considering the influenza vaccine is easy to come across and its low cost, we figured that there is no reason that students are not taking the appropriate steps to prevent sickness. However, after brief research we found that college students, and at IU specifically, rarely take the time to get the vaccine each flu season.

Online Research

We began our research with the Center for Disease Control. They argued the importance of the flu vaccination and mentioned that the vaccine causes antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. This means it is already too late to get vaccinated when someone begins to experience flu symptoms. That information is important because it enforces the importance of getting a vaccine as soon as flu season begins.

The website for the National Foundation for Infectious Disease outlined many reasons people should get vaccinated. Including that strong and intensive data has proven the safety of vaccines, a crucial piece of information. They also noted that young and healthy people are not naturally immune to diseases. Students should try to prevent sickness even when they feel perfectly healthy, as bacteria and viruses are still potentially harmful to those not protected from them. We then narrowed our scope to IU specifically. The IU Health Centers website was information was useful for evaluating the convenience of getting vaccinated there. Unfortunately, we found that they only distribute flu shots around campus on a few days in the fall. Even some of the locations they move to are still out of the way for the average student.
Interview with the IU Health Center

We called the Health Center directly to speak with someone who may be able to inform us how many students they vaccinate on average each flu season. However, we were told they do not maintain that information. Similarly, she mentioned that there is very little advertising around campus regarding flu shots. While these were not the answers we expected, did it demonstrate that IU Health could become more involved in this area of student health.

Survey

We then constructed a survey for IU students and received 92 responses. This sample size is a limitation of our research because 92 students is difficult to generalize over IUs much larger total enrollment. However, it is still a considerably large number and allows us to have a good idea of the rate at which students choose to not get vaccinated and the specific reason why. The survey questions and results are presented in the graphs to the right.

Our greatest takeaway from these results is the high volume of students agreeing to the necessity of the vaccine, combined with their concerns for its inconvenience. That allows us to conclude that students with no intention of getting the influenza vaccine aren't opposed to it. Therefore, the best solution is something that will make students feel more inclined to make the time to get one, rather than cutting the cost of the vaccine for students, as the survey tells us is not a pressing problem.
The Solution

Studies by the National Foundation for Infectious Disease showed that the most successful method for getting students to go out and get the shots was to incentivize them. Our proposed solution is to make immunization an activity that people want to do. To accomplish this we propose that the IU Health Center approaches the Inter-fraternal Council (IFC) at IU about starting a competition. In our proposed competition, an award will be given out to the fraternity and sorority that has the greatest percentage of their house immunized. The winner will then receive a plaque commemorating their accomplishments.

Many Greek houses are even on the same street as the IU Health Center. To make competition and access fair to all houses involved we also propose that the Health Center offer up more temporary locations to get flu shots. In our call with the IU Health Center we found that they offer flu shots in the Indiana Memorial Union four times throughout the fall. While the Union is a busy place, there are better spots that students are traveling through more often. We propose that the Health Center offer up additional flu shots 12 more times throughout the fall semester at Ballantine Hall, The Kelley School of Business, and the School of Public and Environmental Affairs. These locations receive significant foot traffic because of the number of classrooms inside them.

Greek life at IU is a large percentage of the total student body at around 18% or 6,000 students. For most students getting a flu shot is seen as only directly benefiting themselves. But in a competitive format, it makes sense for Greek houses to get them because awards are highly sought after. Added on to this is the fact that Greek house members are consistently closer together and are very vulnerable to outbreaks of sickness. This solution can become a yearly activity that once implemented can result in thousands of vaccinated students who otherwise would go without a shot.
Recommendations

Step 1 – Coordinate with Greek life:
- Health Representative meets with IFC to discuss competition and it’s mutual benefits
- IFC will meet with Presidents Council to explain the rules of the event
- Presidents Council informs general members of organization

Step 2 – Begin competition among Greek organizations:
- Greek Life organizations will keep track of their flu shot totals
- To promote fair play, houses will keep records of individuals flu shot information
- Flu shot records will be sent in by Greek organizations to Health Center by the end of the competition

Step 3 – Set up pop-up flu shot stations:
- Distribute fliers around campus in preparation of each pop-up spot
- Health Center will start their flu shot pop up’s at multiple locations
- This start the 2nd Saturday of October to the Saturday before Finals week

Step 4 – Award fraternities/sororities:
- Data will be analyzed by the Health Center to judge competition success in achieving higher flu shots totals
- A fraternity and sorority will each be announced as a winner
- Winners will receive a plaque to honor their achievement
References


Appendix

Survey of IU Students

**Question 1 – Have you received a flu shot this season?**
- Yes (16)
- No, but I intend to (36)
- No, and I don't intend to (46)

**Question 2 – If you don't intend to, why not?**
- Cost (5)
- I don’t like needles (13)
- I’m too busy/ it's inconvenient (19)
- I don't know where to get one (3)
- Other (38)

**Question 3 – Do you find flu shots necessary?**
- Yes (48)
- No (44)