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REVIEW

# Perceived concern about the new strain of the influenza and obtaining the vaccine in China, Japan and South Korea



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## KEYWORDS

influenza vaccine;  
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**Abstract** This study compares the factors, which influence individuals from the countries of China, Japan and South Korea to obtain any type of influenza vaccines and their perceived concerns about the new strain of the influenza - pandemic (H1N1) 2009. The data analyzed was from the East Asian Social Survey (EASS), Cross-National Survey Data Sets: Health and Society in East Asia, 2010 (ICPSR 34608) ( $N=7938$ ). The results of this study suggest that individuals who are concerned about the new strain of influenza are more likely to have obtained influenza vaccine. In these countries, perceived concerns may be directly related to vaccine-related behaviors. The results of this study also indicate that there are variations within each country regarding as to why individuals do or do not obtain the influenza vaccine. Over all, this project provides new insights about the acquisition of the influenza vaccine within China, Japan and South Korea, which will be useful for medical practice within these countries and future research.

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## Introduction

It is estimated that 5–10% of adults and 20–30% of children are infected by influenza annually, resulting in 250,000–500,000 deaths around the world [1]. Influenza vaccines are important in order to control epidemics and pandemics of influenza [2]. Unfortunately, there are disparities regarding influenza vaccine coverage within and across countries [3,4]. Along with the issues of accessibility and cost, other barriers to obtaining influenza vaccines include lack of time, interest and individual beliefs about the likelihood of being infected [3]. To increase influenza vaccine coverage, it is important to examine social factors and perceptions related to influenza vaccines. This study focused on three Asian countries: China, Japan and South Korea. These countries are among the most populous Asian countries and despite being geographically close, they report notable differences in statistics regarding influenza vaccination profiles.

In China, the average vaccination rate for influenza was 9% in 2011. This is much lower than the average rates in more developed countries [5]. The influenza vaccine is not covered under the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), and individuals who would like to receive an influenza vaccine have to pay the full cost out-of-pocket [6]. As a result, the majority of people are not willing to receive non-EPI covered vaccines, leaving a large portion of the population unprotected from influenza [6].

In Japan, which has universal health insurance, influenza vaccines are not covered by insurance [7]. However, some individuals (e.g. individuals

aged 65 or older—the eligibility criteria vary across municipalities) are eligible to receive fee waivers [7]. Japan had the schoolchild vaccine program to control influenza from 1962 to 1994, which did contribute to decreased mortality from influenza in children [8]. More recently, however, parents of children under the age of 13 are concerned about the adverse effects of influenza vaccines, thus lowering the number of children in this age range from getting the vaccine [9]. Among adults age 20–69 years old, common reasons to not obtain the influenza vaccine include lack of time and perceived low susceptibility to influenza [10]. There is also an issue of mistrust in vaccination recommendations and side effects [11]. The influenza vaccine coverage rate in Japan in 2010/2011 was 38.6% [12].

In South Korea, a National Immunization Program (NIP) provides free influenza vaccine to priority groups, such as individuals aged 65 or older, individuals in poverty, individuals with disabilities, and soldiers, for seasonal influenza vaccination [13]. The highest percentage of the South Korean population recorded to have obtained flu vaccines was 43.6% between 2008 and 2012 [13]. Because the influenza vaccination coverage among the individuals in the age group of 50–64 years tends to be low, it has been recommended that the availability of the influenza vaccine at the workplace needs to be improved [14].

The purpose of this study is to compare the factors influencing the procurement of influenza vaccines and the perceived concerns about the new strain of the influenza in China, Japan and South Korea. Because there are significant

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