

Example Op-Ed Use of Information

Another View ; Unvaccinated adults increase consequences and costs for all

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Let's get something clear: A flu vaccination might be a personal decision, but the consequences of not vaccinating affect all of us.

Unvaccinated adults don't just risk their own health and well-being, and that of the people around them. They also cost us \$7.1 billion a year. And by "us," I mean all of us. Taxpayers. Employers. Co-workers.

No one lives in complete isolation. We're part of an interlocking society, interdependent on each other's choices. And nowhere is that more obvious than public health, especially when it comes to communicable diseases that could easily be prevented by vaccination.

The figure of \$7.1 billion comes from a comprehensive study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, published in the journal *Health Affairs*. Researchers looked at 10 adult vaccines recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the numbers of people stricken with those preventable diseases, and the costs incurred: medications required for their illnesses, doctor's visits and hospitalizations, and lost productivity at the workplace.

By far the costliest disease is the flu, a disease many people mistakenly regard as a mild illness. But make no mistake: flu is a killer that takes an average of 23,000 lives a year and causes more than 200,000 hospitalizations in the U.S. alone.

When those flu victims are on some form of public health insurance, there is a direct cost to the taxpayers. When they are on private insurance, it still affects others because insurance costs are pooled among the members. When some people in those pools incur high medical costs, the premiums go up the next year for everyone in the pool. Then there's the cost to companies when employees are out for extended periods with serious illnesses; the lost productivity means reduced profit, which translates into less hiring and suppressed wages. The total tab for flu alone? Nearly \$5.8 billion, the study found, more than all the other vaccine-preventable illnesses combined.

We have an easy and effective solution: Vaccination.

The CDC estimates that during 2014-15, the vaccines prevented about 966,000 medical visits a year and 67,000 hospitalizations. That's not to mention the misery and fatalities avoided; about 1.9 million people didn't get sick with flu thanks to vaccine. And that was a flu season during which the vaccine was not a particularly effective one; most years, vaccination prevents far more hospitalizations.

Yet fewer than half of Texas adults were vaccinated against flu in 2015. If we got that number close to rates for childhood immunizations, it would be a success that saves the U.S. roughly \$68.8 billion a year.

All of us play a part. We can start by getting the flu vaccine every year for ourselves and our families. And lawmakers and community leaders must make improving vaccination rates for adults - especially against flu - a priority. After all, for those who want to help businesses, reduce the tax burden and help the middle class with rising health-insurance costs, promoting higher vaccination rates for adults is one of the smartest policies imaginable.

Anna C. Dragsbaek is president and CEO of The Immunization Partnership, a statewide nonprofit organization that aims to eradicate vaccine-preventable diseases.

526 words

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Undocumented Information

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