

Flu vaccine distributing plans announced

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U.S. mathematical biologists say they've developed flu vaccine distribution alternatives for use when faced with vaccine shortages during flu outbreaks.

The University of Texas researchers used contact network epidemiology to model various strategies, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control strategy of targeting high-risk groups, such as infants, senior citizens and people with health complications. They also tested the idea of targeting school children, who are critical vectors in moving diseases through communities.

"If we only have a limited flu vaccine supply, the best distribution strategy depends on the contagiousness of the strain," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, assistant professor of integrative biology. "We can more effectively control mildly contagious strains by vaccinating school children, while we can more effectively control moderately and highly contagious strains by vaccinating high-risk groups."

If there is no information available about the contagiousness of a flu strain or if vaccines are only available after the outbreak begins, the study recommends prioritizing vaccines for people in high-risk groups who can experience the greatest complications due to the disease.

The research appears in the current issue of the journal PLoS Medicine.

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