

Should new flu shot study be believed?

A report coming out of Chicago earlier this week probably has most of America's senior citizens shaking their heads.

It has to do with flu shots.

National Institutes of Health researchers are challenging the standard government drumbeat that senior citizens get flu shots. The researchers suggest that practice has not saved any lives.

The study's lead author, Lone Simonsen, a senior epidemiologist at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said, "There is a sense that we're all going to die if we don't get the flu shot. Maybe that's a little much."

Simonsen said that perhaps by expanding vaccinations to school children — the biggest spreaders of the flu virus — the elderly would be protected without flu shots.

Of course the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta said it plans no change in its advice on who should get flu shots, contending the National Institutes of Health research isn't enough to shift gears.

"We think the best way to help the elderly is to vaccinate them," said the Center's epidemiologist William Thompson.

Chiming in on the debate is Ira Longini, a biostatistics professor at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health. He said the flu vaccine is less effective in the elderly than in younger people.

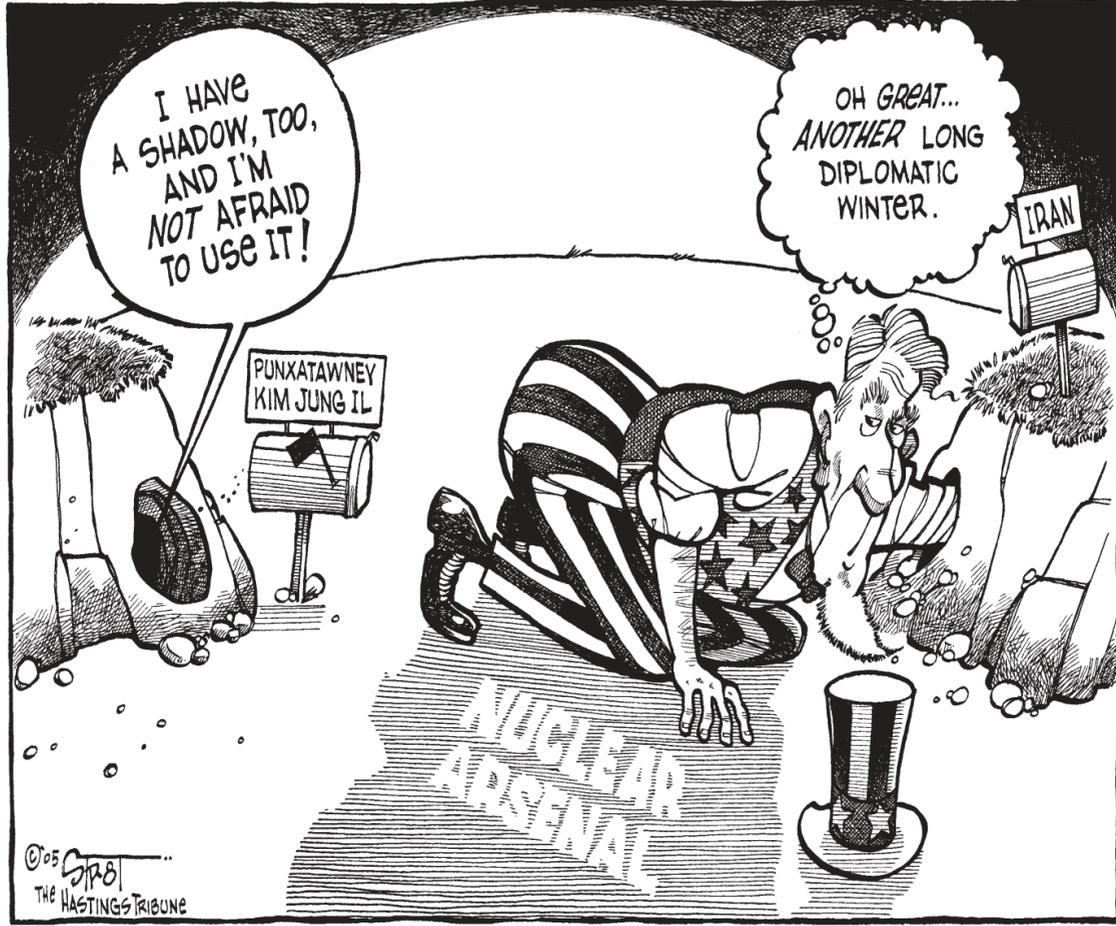
While he says it is smart for senior citizens to get their yearly flu shots because it can decrease their risk of getting sick, that a smarter government strategy would emphasize shots for children, ages 5-18. His statistical models show that strategy could save more elderly Americans from hospital visits and death.

Statistics further show that for the average senior citizen, the annual risk of dying from the flu is low — about 1 in 1,000.

Regardless, all agree that senior citizens are still urged to get flu shots, but they shouldn't panic if vaccine isn't available.

Best advice we can give? Listen to what your doctor says.

— Tom Dreiling



Heartbreaker hits it off with guy

Youngest daughter is an infamous heartbreaker. At 27, she has dated and discarded more beaux than Elizabeth Taylor. It's not that she's mean. She's just picky.

She's willing to date a guy who seems nice, or interesting, but if, after a week or a month, it isn't working out, she dumps them.

I know of at least two young men who have followed her back to Lawrence after summer break only to find themselves with an education, but no girl.

Last year, she decided it was time to make a change in her life. She was still young and single, and after nine years in Lawrence, she decided to go somewhere new and fresh, so she enrolled in the University of South Carolina's graduate school.

It was only later that we found out there were a few ulterior motives for picking Columbia, S.C., as her new home.

We already knew that Columbia is only an hour's drive from Augusta, Ga., where her big sister Felicia and brother-in-law Nik live.

It's also the home of Bradley Harrison Blake, a young man who works for big sister at Morris Digital Works.

Mom and Dad got into big trouble for describing Brad as "some guy Lindsay's dating" in the annual Christmas letter.

Open Season

Cynthia Haynes



Apparently, when youngest daughter went to Augusta to visit her sister last spring, there was a party at Nik and Felicia's. Lindsay and Brad were introduced, and the two hit it off.

After all the other guests had left and Nik and Felicia gone to bed, Lindsay and Brad sat on the front porch and talked into the night.

I know this, because Nik and Felicia said they kept creeping to the window to see if they were still on the porch.

Aren't chaperones wonderful?

All the rest of the school year and through the summer, Lindsay and Brad kept in touch and talked on the phone — for hours and hours.

Now that Lindsay has moved to Columbia, she and her beau call each other every night and they get together every weekend.

So during Christmas break, after getting into trouble over the Christmas let-

ter, I figured I'd better find out more about this young man. Her father obviously wasn't doing his job of giving the kid the third degree.

Bradley is from Chicago, I learned. He graduated from the University of Missouri with a double major in journalism and computer science.

So far so good. He's from the Midwest. He's a Big 12 graduate and has got a journalism degree.

He's tall by our standards, 5 foot, 10 inches, and skinny. Why do short women always pick the tall men? He has dark hair and eyes and a little goatee.

His parents have moved to Phoenix and he has a sister, Catherine, who is a senior in high school.

He likes cats but is allergic to them, and he won't eat his vegetables.

Lindsay's working on the vegetables and I got the cats.

No, mother, he's not Catholic.

This may be serious, but they haven't gotten to the take-each-other-home-to-meet the family stage yet, so we'll see.

Oldest daughter says he's a great guy. The only problem she sees is if the two decide to make this permanent, she'll have to move him to another department, and she doesn't want to lose one of her best Internet code writers.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Child safety is top priority for patrol

To the Editor:
The week of Feb. 13-20 is National Child Safety Awareness week. During this week, Kansas Highway Patrol personnel and other Public Service Agencies will be conducting child safety seat installations, enforcement lanes and programs across the state. The sole purpose of these activities is to promote and improve the traveling safety of children.

Motor vehicle crashes are still the lead-

ing cause of death across the nation for children age 0-18. Since 1993, you and I have improved the compliance rate in child restraint usage by 6 percent. While this is an improvement, we can do better.

Be a leader. Lead by example and protect our future — children. Buckle up.

Lieutenant Douglas C. Griffiths
Kansas Highway Patrol
Troop D, Norton

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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Letters aren't so corny anymore

When I was young and foolish, I used to think that Christmas letters were a kind of corny sentimentality where people went on and on about their dull, boring lives.

Now that I am old and foolish, I've begun to value them more each year. They give me a connection to the friends we've collected over the years, but seldom see anymore.

Maybe I'm less judgmental than I used to be. Maybe I have grown more sentimental.

I've begun to realize, too, that others like these letters, too. After years of not writing a Christmas letter, we've been doing one for more than a decade.

Apparently, some of our readers have gotten used to them. When Cynthia ran short this year, she didn't bother to make more copies for the "local" list. We got a couple of complaints.

I find the letters fascinating, even when they come from high school chums and distant cousins whose kids I hardly know, if at all. If you read the letters, you can follow each family from childhood through college, work and weddings to grandchildren and, eventually, to the grave.

I organize my reading into little piles, and I seldom just read what comes in today's mail. Christmas cards, I read and take note of the signatures. They go on display on the mantle.

The letters form a little pile on a side table until the day, usually over the holidays, but sometimes well after Martin Luther King Jr. Day, when I find time. Then I read them, one after one.

Sandy and John write that everyone is

On the Prairie Dog Steve Haynes



well and happy in Kansas City, and the grandkids are growing up so fast. They've made allowance, I guess, for the adult daughter they lost.

The Eimons, Paul and Pan, write that they are leaving Amarillo for her home state of Tennessee. They've traveled the world in his career as a mining geologist.

Mary Braden writes from Hays that she is still working, but Randall has retired (again) and spends time with his new Harley Hog. Guess he's flying lower these days.

Evan includes a photo collage of his family's year, including a report on the family cats. (You thought Cynthia was the only one, huh?)

Kids take first place in most letters, though increasingly, grandkids crowd them out. Diane writes that her Cathy is in her fourth year of medical school. She says the rains this year produced a bumper crop of tumbleweeds in west Texas, where she is one of the world's top experts on buffalo.

Bill and Tammy have their picture with their dog, now that their daughter is off to Colorado State. "Hope things are going well in Kansas," she writes.

Some friends seem to live in a different world. Mary Lyn says her boys were

getting used to living in Colorado after a year in London. The 1989 au pair came to visit from Grenoble, and the family toured Provence and Bordeaux.

Gary and Charlene have settled in southern Colorado, so we have to stop and see them next year.

Lea had trouble getting her college-age girls together for a picture, says it's harder all the time. We all notice that, Lea. She's in her 13th year of teaching, and her daughter Lauren, a leggy blonde, is big on the drag racing circuit.

Teri skipped her letter last year and has some catching up to do. Life hasn't been all roses, but she doesn't mention the thorns. Good for her.

Jeanne has quit her job and found another. After 25 years in the Air Force, she's becoming more independent, I think. I still remember the day she abandoned her plans to be a teacher and signed up for Officer Candidate School. The military was not that popular in the early '70s.

Then Ray writes from Austin that he's free of parole, and in Texas, he can vote again despite his drug conviction. A brilliant reporter and editor, he did seven years in federal stir after falling in with a biker meth gang. Now he's finally graduating from college and thinking about a masters.

Bev, who had all these kids, now has all these grandkids, with more on the way, and she takes a word or two to tell you about each one.

Fascinating. I wouldn't trade the stack of them for a good novel, but I'm still going to try to keep mine shorter next year.