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(VIDEO) Govt. Study: Flu Shots Not Effective in Elderly--Potentially Deadly

By Sharyl Attkisson | October 7, 2024

9.5K

This story was first published on CBS News in 2006. The video and story have been wiped from the Internet. However, a copy of the [video can be found here](#) and transcript can be found below.

An important and definitive “mainstream” government study done nearly a decade ago got little attention because the science came down on the wrong side. It found that after decades and billions of dollars spent promoting flu shots for the elderly, the mass vaccination program did not result in saving lives. In fact, the death rate among the elderly increased substantially.



The authors of the study admitted a bias going into the study. Here was the history as described to me: Public health experts long assumed flu shots were effective in the elderly. But, paradoxically, all the studies done failed to demonstrate a benefit. Instead of considering that they, the experts, could be wrong—instead of believing the scientific data—the public health experts assumed the *studies* were wrong. After all, flu shots have to work, right?



So the NIH launched an effort to do “the” definitive study that would actually prove, for the first time, once and for all, that flu shots were beneficial to the elderly. The government would gather some of the brightest scientific minds for the research, and adjust for all kinds of factors that could be masking that presumed benefit.

But when they finished, no matter how they crunched the numbers, the data kept telling the same story: flu shots were of no benefit to the elderly. Quite the opposite. The death rate had increased markedly since widespread flu vaccination among older Americans. The scientists finally had to acknowledge that decades of public health thought had been mistaken.

[Read the government study that found no flu shot benefit in elderly](#)

In 2006, lead author Lone Simonsen spoke with me on the phone and agreed to do an on camera interview with me on her study results, which she felt were very important. However, her bosses at the National Institutes of Health blocked the interview. I ended up finding one of her co-authors who was independent from the government and was able to interview him. These study authors who were honest, at their own career peril, should be commended.

After the Simonsen study, [many international studies also arrived at the same conclusion](#). You probably haven't heard much about these “incendiary” findings. Too much money being made promoting flu shots?

[Read Simonsen's commentary on her study](#)

[Read current CDC flu information](#)

[Here's my original video story on the topic](#): *The video has been removed. If anybody has a copy, please write to me at info@sharylattkisson.com*

Transcript below:

Flu shots and elderly, CBS News, Sharyl Attkisson

2006

Millions of seniors swear by their annual flu shots. After all, 90% of the people killed by the flu are 65 or older. But CBS News has learned that behind the scenes, public health officials have come to a new and disturbing conclusion: mass vaccinations of the elderly haven't done the job. Dr. Walter

Orenstein was among the first to notice the problem when he headed up the Centers for Disease Control's national immunization program. He says it's now become a consensus among public health experts.

Dr. Orenstein: "What is absolutely clear is that there is still a substantial burden of deaths and hospitalizations out there that has not been prevented through the present strategy."

Here's what scientists have found. Over 20 years, the percentage of seniors getting flu shots increased sharply from 15% to 65%. It stands to reason that flu deaths among the elderly should have taken a dramatic dip making an "X" graph like this (refers to graphic). Instead, flu deaths among the elderly continued to climb. It was hard to believe, so researchers at the National Institutes of Health set out to do a study adjusting for all kinds of factors that could be masking the true benefits of the shots. But no matter how they crunched the numbers, they got the same disappointing result: flu shots had not reduced deaths among the elderly. It's not what health officials hoped to find. NIH wouldn't let us interview the study's lead author. So we went to Boston and found the only co-author of the study not employed by NIH: Dr. Tom Reichert.

Dr. Reichert: "We realized we had incendiary material."

Dr. Reichert said they thought their study would prove vaccinations helped.

Dr. Reichert: "We were trying to do something mainstream. That's for sure."

Sharyl: "Were you surprised?"

Dr. Reichert: "Astonished."

Sharyl: "Did you check the data a couple of times to make sure?"

Dr. Reichert: "Well, even more than that. We've looked at other countries now and the same is true."

That international study, soon to be published, finds the same poor results in Australia, France, Canada and the UK. And other new research stokes the idea that decades of promoting flu shots in seniors, and the billions spent, haven't had the desired result. The current head of national immunizations confirms CDC is now looking at new strategies, but stops short of calling the present strategy a failure.

Dr. Anne Schuchat: "There's an active dialogue about how we can do better to prevent influenza and its complications in the elderly."

So what's an older person to do? The CDC says they should still get their flu shots. That it could make the flu less severe or prevent problems not reflected in the total numbers. But watch for CDC to likely shift in the near future more toward protecting the elderly in a roundabout way by pushing to vaccinate more children and others around the who could give them the flu. (Note: the

government quickly followed this news with a recommendation to vaccinate children and infants for flu.)

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Emmy-Award Winning Nonpartisan Investigative Journalist, New York Times Bestselling Author, Host of Sinclair's Full Measure. I follow the facts, not the crowd.

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