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Letter to the Editor

On 10 January 2020, Greg Wolff published a study examining if seasonal influenza vaccination was associated with an increased odds of becoming infected with a respiratory virus other than influenza, a phenomenon known as virus interference https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264410X19313647).

Influenza vaccination data and viral respiratory laboratory results were obtained for the 20172018 influenza season. While the study found no association with influenza vaccination and overall risk of becoming infected with other respiratory viruses (slight decrease in odds was observed), when examining the association with influenza vaccination and the risk of becoming infected with specific viruses at the individual level, there were two viruses that showed significantly increased odds (endemic coronavirus and human metapneumovirus).

Coronavirus results in this study represented the four endemic, regularly circulating strains of coronavirus (229E, NL63, OC43, and HKU1) during the 20172018 influenza season, not novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The four circulating strains of coronavirus have existed in the general population for years, first identified in the mid-1960s. At the time of the study, and even at the time of initial electronic publication, COVID-19 was not yet in existence.

Established levels of immunity in the general population for the four circulating strains of coronavirus at the time of the study when compared to lack of immunity for the novel COVID-19 strain make any sort of correlation between vaccination and COVID-19 invalid.

Therefore, the results of this study cannot and should not be interpreted to represent any sort of relationship or association of influenza vaccination receipt and COVID-19 illness. Results from this study DO NOT support the anti-vaccination viewpoint of avoiding seasonal influenza vaccination, and in fact should be interpreted in the opposite manner, since significant protection against influenza was associated with vaccination receipt, and a slight decrease in the odds of infection from other respiratory viruses was also noted.

Results from this study should not be applied to or interpreted with COVID-19 in any way.

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