Swine Flu and Its Vaccine

By Amarachi Eseonu

“The infamous combination of runny nose, fever, and sore throat that has caused thousands of individuals in the United States, including several Harvard students, to seek medical attention, constitutes the notorious H1N1 virus. Although most people make annual visits to their primary care physicians to receive vaccination for the infectious seasonal flu, the 2009-2010 flu season presented a serious deviation from the norm: the rise of a specific viral strain of influenza, called the H1N1 virus or “swine flu.” While the seasonal flu continued to spread as usual, the appearance of H1N1 gave rise to extraordinary societal hype about the H1N1 flu. Global media continuously reported H1N1 news; daily reports relayed information ranging from the symptoms of the virus to when the next vaccine shipment would arrive.

On April 17th 2009, medical officials at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed two cases of swine flu (1). By September 20th, 2009, the H1N1 virus had been identified in almost 191 countries and territories (2). As a result, an escalating social panic began. Countless posters, articles, blogs, and websites emerged detailing methods of preventing the disease, from not going to the gym to ceasing to drink alcohol (3). Music videos were created, especially rap, to draw the attention of the younger crowd (4). Health maps and online monitoring of the virus emerged, allowing individuals to track areas that contained infected populations (5). Even at Harvard’s 2009 graduation ceremony, one could not escape the hysteria: signs and emails discouraged congratulatory hugs and handshakes to minimize interpersonal contact.

Walking down the street during the 2009-2010 flu season, one would inevitably notice people wearing medical masks. Hand sanitizing became ubiquitous, from building lobbies to
In April 2010, the World Health Organization admitted that they handled the H1N1 flu pandemic incorrectly, stating that they overplayed the dangers of the virus.

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References: