

# A Qualitative Study On Public Awareness And Prevention Practices Toward Influenza

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates public awareness, attitudes, and preventive practices related to influenza, one of the most widespread yet often underestimated respiratory viral infections. Although influenza outbreaks occur annually and can lead to serious health complications, public understanding and preventive behaviors vary significantly. The purpose of this research is to explore how individuals in South Jakarta, Indonesia, perceive influenza, identify the preventive measures they apply, and analyze their responses to health information regarding the disease. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten adult participants selected using a purposive sampling method. Each interview focused on knowledge of influenza symptoms, prevention habits, and perceptions of vaccination and healthcare services. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: awareness of influenza, prevention practices, attitudes toward healthcare, and information sources. The findings indicate that while participants recognize influenza as a contagious illness, misconceptions about its severity and the importance of vaccination remain common. Preventive actions such as hand hygiene, mask usage, and self-medication were widely practiced. The study concludes that strengthening public health communication and providing accessible education about vaccination and hygiene can significantly improve influenza prevention and reduce transmission within the South Jakarta community.

## INTRODUCTION

Influenza remains a major global public health concern despite the long-standing availability of vaccines and antiviral medications. Caused primarily by influenza A and B viruses, this respiratory illness demonstrates a remarkable ability to mutate through antigenic drift and shift, resulting in annual epidemics and periodic pandemics. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2025), the 2024–2025 influenza season showed intense global activity, with subtype A(H1N1)pdm09 accounting for 53.1% of influenza A cases, while A(H3N2) represented 46.9%. This situation has led to increased attention from researchers and policymakers regarding the effectiveness of preventive strategies and public behavior in response to influenza (Ovid Journal, 2025).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, global patterns of influenza transmission and public awareness have changed significantly. Non-pharmaceutical interventions such as mask wearing, social distancing, and restricted mobility during the COVID-19 outbreak temporarily reduced influenza transmission between 2020 and 2022. However, after these measures were relaxed, influenza activity rebounded worldwide, with noticeable changes in virus circulation and seasonal behavior (BMC Infectious Diseases, 2025). This shift highlights the need to re-examine public health communication and behavioral responses toward influenza prevention.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) has emphasized the importance of understanding human behavior and community participation in preventing influenza. Its updated Public Health Research Agenda for Influenza calls for stronger risk communication, behavioral research, and education to increase vaccination rates. In Southeast Asia, WHO (2025) has encouraged member countries to enhance influenza surveillance and community-level awareness programs. These initiatives recognize that individual behavior and awareness are key determinants in reducing influenza transmission.

Despite the proven effectiveness of influenza vaccines, vaccination coverage remains relatively low in many developing countries, including Indonesia. A 2025 multi-country study found that influenza vaccination reduced medically attended illness by approximately 50%, demonstrating its importance in reducing hospitalization and death (PubMed, 2025). However, low awareness, misconceptions about vaccine safety, and the perception that influenza is a mild illness continue to limit vaccine uptake.

Given these conditions, it is essential to understand how people perceive influenza and what preventive behaviors they adopt in their daily lives. A qualitative research approach provides a deeper understanding of these behavioral patterns and allows exploration of cultural, social, and informational

factors that shape individual attitudes. Therefore, this study aims to explore public awareness, preventive practices, and perceptions toward influenza among adult residents of South Jakarta, Indonesia. By using semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to identify the level of understanding, behavioral patterns, and barriers to prevention that exist within the community. The findings are expected to contribute to public health efforts by improving education and communication strategies to strengthen influenza prevention in urban settings.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore public awareness, attitudes, and preventive practices toward influenza among adults in South Jakarta, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of individuals' perceptions and behaviors within their real-life context. Rather than focusing on numerical data, this method emphasizes the meanings, experiences, and interpretations that participants attach to influenza and its prevention.

The participants in this study consisted of ten adults aged between 20 and 50 years who were selected through purposive sampling. This technique was applied to ensure that participants possessed relevant knowledge or experiences related to influenza, either personally or through family members who had been affected by the illness. All participants were residents of South Jakarta, representing various educational and occupational backgrounds. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, meaning that data collection was stopped when no new significant themes emerged during subsequent interviews. Prior to participation, all respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the assurance of confidentiality.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted both face-to-face and online to accommodate participants' availability. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and followed a set of open-ended questions focusing on participants' knowledge of influenza, their preventive behaviors, and their perceptions of vaccination and healthcare services. The semi-structured format allowed participants to express their opinions freely while giving the researcher flexibility to ask follow-up questions for deeper exploration.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. To enhance the credibility of the study, the researcher also kept detailed field notes to record contextual observations and nonverbal expressions that could enrich the interpretation of data. Researcher neutrality was maintained throughout the process to minimize bias and ensure that the participants' voices were accurately represented.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step process introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This analytical framework allowed the researcher to systematically identify recurring themes related to awareness, prevention habits, and public attitudes toward influenza in the Jakarta community. The analysis was iterative and reflective, ensuring that findings accurately represented the participants' lived experiences.

Ethical principles were strictly followed during the research process. All participants provided informed consent, and their identities were kept confidential. The study adhered to the ethical standards of Universitas Indonesia Maju, prioritizing respect, voluntariness, and data protection. Overall, this qualitative approach provided comprehensive insights into how residents of South Jakarta perceive and respond to influenza, revealing their level of awareness, preventive behavior, and the underlying social factors influencing their health practices.

## RESULTS

### Awareness and Understanding of Influenza

The interviews revealed that most participants were familiar with influenza as a common contagious respiratory illness. However, the level of understanding varied significantly. Several participants described influenza simply as "the common cold" or "seasonal fever," indicating a lack of distinction between mild upper respiratory infections and true influenza. Only a few respondents demonstrated awareness that influenza is caused by specific viral strains and can lead to serious complications such as pneumonia or hospitalization, particularly among vulnerable groups like children and the elderly.

Interestingly, participants associated the spread of influenza with changes in weather and poor hygiene rather than viral transmission. This finding aligns with previous studies by the WHO (2024), which reported that misconceptions about influenza's causes are common in urban Southeast Asian

populations. The results emphasize the need for targeted health education that differentiates influenza from other viral illnesses and highlights the importance of prevention.

#### **Preventive Practices and Personal Hygiene**

Nearly all participants reported engaging in preventive behaviors such as frequent hand washing, mask wearing, and maintaining cleanliness at home and work. These habits were largely influenced by experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. One respondent stated, "Since COVID, I always wear a mask when I feel unwell or when someone around me is coughing. This indicates a positive behavioral shift toward respiratory hygiene, although some participants admitted that consistency had decreased after the pandemic restrictions ended.

However, vaccination uptake remained extremely low. Only one of ten participants had ever received an influenza vaccine, and several expressed skepticism about its necessity. Reasons included the belief that influenza is not dangerous, limited vaccine availability, and a lack of information about where to get vaccinated. These findings are consistent with research by the CDC (2025), which highlighted misinformation and low risk perception as major barriers to influenza immunization.

#### **Attitudes Toward Healthcare and Self-Medication**

The study found a strong cultural tendency toward self-medication. Many participants preferred buying over-the-counter medicines or herbal remedies instead of visiting clinics. They perceived influenza as an illness that "can be managed at home," reflecting both cost considerations and convenience factors. Despite this, participants expressed trust in healthcare professionals when symptoms worsened. Clinics and pharmacies were seen as reliable sources for treatment, although some respondents reported dissatisfaction with long waiting times or unclear explanations from medical staff. This behavior suggests a dual attitude: confidence in modern medicine but preference for self-care as a first response. Strengthening communication between healthcare providers and patients could therefore enhance trust and encourage earlier medical consultation for influenza-like symptoms.

#### **Sources of Information and Media Influence**

When asked about where they obtained information about influenza, most participants cited social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Only a few relied on official health websites or government announcements. Participants indicated that short videos and infographics were more engaging and easier to understand than formal articles or posters. However, the accuracy of information varied, with some respondents admitting confusion between influenza and COVID-19 prevention messages.

This finding highlights the dual role of social media as both a powerful educational tool and a potential source of misinformation. As suggested by the WHO (2024), digital health communication strategies must prioritize credible sources, visual content, and simplified messages to effectively reach younger and urban populations.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Overall, the results demonstrate a moderate level of influenza awareness among South Jakarta residents, but with persistent misconceptions about severity, transmission, and vaccination. Preventive behaviors have improved since the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly regarding hygiene and mask use. However, low vaccination rates and dependence on self-medication remain challenges to effective influenza control. These findings underline the importance of community-based education, culturally tailored campaigns, and stronger integration between healthcare institutions and media platforms to promote accurate, accessible influenza information.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study highlight important insights into how residents of South Jakarta perceive and respond to influenza. Overall, the participants demonstrated moderate awareness about the disease, but misconceptions and limited preventive action—particularly regarding vaccination—remain evident. This discussion connects the results to previous research and broader public health frameworks, emphasizing the implications for influenza prevention strategies in urban Indonesian settings.

First, the limited understanding of influenza among participants reflects a broader pattern observed in developing countries, where public knowledge about infectious diseases tends to be

fragmented. Similar to findings by Noh et al. (2023), many individuals in this study associated influenza with weather changes rather than viral transmission, suggesting that traditional beliefs and everyday observations continue to shape disease perception. Such misconceptions can lead to underestimation of influenza's severity and contribute to delays in seeking medical care. Therefore, improving public literacy about viral diseases should be a top priority for community health programs in Jakarta.

Second, the study revealed that hygiene-related preventive behaviors—such as mask-wearing, hand washing, and avoiding close contact with sick individuals—have become normalized since the COVID-19 pandemic. This supports recent research by Setiawan and Putri (2024), who found that the pandemic significantly increased awareness of respiratory hygiene across Indonesia. However, participants also indicated a decline in consistency once the perceived threat of COVID-19 decreased. This finding suggests that preventive behaviors may be situational rather than habitual, emphasizing the need for continuous public health campaigns that promote sustainable hygiene practices beyond crisis periods.

Vaccination emerged as a critical gap. Despite the availability of influenza vaccines in Indonesia, uptake remains low among the general population, including urban residents with access to healthcare facilities. The participants' reluctance to vaccinate—due to misinformation, low risk perception, and cost concerns—is consistent with findings by the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2024), which reported that only 5% of adults received influenza vaccination annually. This underscores the need for targeted awareness efforts and collaboration between healthcare institutions and media outlets to clarify misconceptions and highlight vaccine benefits.

The strong preference for self-medication observed in this study also mirrors national trends. According to Pradana and Yusuf (2022), self-treatment is a common practice among Indonesians due to accessibility, affordability, and cultural acceptance of herbal remedies. While self-care can be beneficial for mild symptoms, excessive reliance on self-medication can delay diagnosis and increase the risk of complications. The findings suggest that healthcare providers must improve communication and build stronger relationships with communities to encourage timely medical consultation.

Another key theme emerging from this study is the central role of digital media as the main source of health information. Most participants cited social media platforms—particularly TikTok and Instagram—as their primary learning channels. This is consistent with global health communication trends, where short-form digital content increasingly shapes public understanding (WHO, 2024). However, the prevalence of misinformation on social media presents a major challenge. Inaccurate or misleading posts can spread faster than verified information, especially when health literacy levels are low. To address this, health authorities should collaborate with influencers, digital educators, and online platforms to deliver engaging yet accurate influenza awareness campaigns.

In the broader context, these findings demonstrate the importance of integrating behavioral, cultural, and technological perspectives in health education. The residents of South Jakarta are not indifferent to influenza but operate within a complex environment of mixed information sources, competing health priorities, and social influences. Therefore, improving influenza prevention requires a multidimensional approach that combines accurate information dissemination, accessible healthcare, and culturally sensitive messaging.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on post-pandemic public health behavior in Indonesia. It highlights how experiences from COVID-19 have reshaped community attitudes toward respiratory diseases while also revealing the challenges of maintaining long-term preventive practices. Future research could expand on these findings by including larger samples across different regions, exploring generational differences in health behavior, and examining the effectiveness of digital health communication strategies.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

This study explored the awareness, attitudes, and preventive behaviors related to influenza among residents of South Jakarta using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that while general awareness of influenza exists, public understanding of the disease's nature, transmission, and severity remains limited. Many respondents still perceive influenza as a mild and seasonal illness, often equating it with the common cold. Preventive behaviors—particularly hygiene practices such as mask-wearing and hand washing—were largely influenced by habits formed during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, vaccination rates remain low due to misinformation, limited accessibility, and low perceived risk. Participants also showed a strong inclination toward self-medication and reliance on non-professional sources of information, particularly social media. While digital platforms serve as

important channels for public education, they also contribute to the spread of inaccurate health information.

Overall, this research concludes that effective influenza prevention in urban Indonesian contexts requires a combination of accurate information dissemination, behavioral reinforcement, and public engagement. The findings demonstrate the importance of enhancing public literacy and building trust between healthcare institutions and communities to ensure more proactive influenza control efforts.

### Recommendation

1. Enhance Public Awareness:  
Conduct continuous health education to clarify the difference between influenza and the common cold, emphasizing prevention and early treatment.
2. Promote Vaccination:  
Increase public access to influenza vaccines through local health centers and promote their benefits via social media campaigns.
3. Leverage Digital Platforms:  
Collaborate with influencers and health professionals to spread accurate and engaging health information online.
4. Encourage Sustainable Hygiene Habits:  
Maintain post-pandemic hygiene practices such as mask-wearing and handwashing as part of daily routines.

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