

# Flu shots a good choice, even now, health officials say

By Lori Kersey  
Staff writer

If you have not gotten a flu shot this season yet, there's still time. Flu vaccinations make a difference, even in the winter, health officials say.

It's never too late for a flu shot, said Dr. Michael Brumage, executive director of the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department.

"You can continue to get the flu shot into the spring," he said.

Flu vaccines typically protect against three or four strains of the flu. So even if one strain of the virus has already gone through a community, a person can get a second type of the flu, he said.

"In other words, you can get it more than once in a season if it's two different strains," Brumage said.

No one knows for sure how long immunity to a strain of the flu lasts once a person has gotten a vaccine, he said. There have been reports of the immunity lasting from one year to the next, but they definitely last for the length of a flu season, he said. There's no evidence that a person can be too early in getting a flu shot, he said.

Brumage recommends that everyone in the community who is able get a flu shot. Flu shots are especially recommended for the elderly and children, those with chronic illnesses, those with obesity, and those who live in nursing homes. They're also especially recommended for women who are pregnant or who might become pregnant during the flu season, Brumage said.

"Exposing the baby to a wild type of flu virus is more danger than immunization," Brumage said.

"Everyone should get a flu shot, and that's because of a thing called herd immunity," he said. "If enough people are immunized, it protects those who can't or don't get a flu



Gazette-Mail file photo

A vaccine administrator places a Band-aid on a patient's arm after giving her a flu shot. Health officials say it's never too late to get a flu shot.

shot. Basically, it protects an entire population and not just yourself."

Flu shots are available at the

health department, 108 Lee St E, Charleston, during regular business hours. The health department accepts insurance

from those who have it, but it also has some flu shots provided by the state for those who don't have insurance.

For more information, contact the health department at 304-344-5243 or visit [www.kchdvw.org](http://www.kchdvw.org).

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# Diet rich in fruits, vegetables outweighs pesticide risk, study says

By Cara Rosenbloom  
The Washington Post

When you shop for groceries, do you carry a copy of the Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen," list with you? It's a list of the 12 vegetables and fruits with the most pesticides, and some people only buy organic versions of the items on the list. It's the companion piece to the "Clean Fifteen," which showcases the 15 options with the least pesticides.

These annual reports generate a lot of media coverage, and their presence seems to influence our grocery shopping habits. But research shows that the lists — which are being questioned for their scientific validity — may be doing more harm than good.

Organic... or nothing? It's vital to eat your veggies.

Low in calories but rich in vitamins and antioxidants, vegetables and fruits have been linked with a reduced risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity. Yet, most Americans aren't getting enough. Could the "Dirty Dozen" list may be part of the problem?

That depends on what message we take away when we read about pesticides in vegetables and fruit. Researchers at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago wanted to know how the list influences our buying habits. They surveyed more than 500 low-income shoppers about their thoughts on organic and conventional vegetables and fruit, and published results in the journal Nutrition Today.

They found that specifically naming the "Dirty Dozen" resulted in shoppers being less likely to buy any vegetables and fruit. That's right — it's not just consumption of the top 12 pesticide-laden items that drops, it seems we buy and eat less of every vegetable and fruit. Misinformation about pesticides breeds fear and con-



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fusion, and many find it easier to skip fresh produce altogether.

And when asked about the promotion of organic produce, 61 percent of participants said they felt the media encouraged them to buy organic foods. The problem is that they are often unaffordable.

So, does it really make sense to pay up to 47 percent more for organic vegetables and fruit? Food toxicologist Carl K. Winter doesn't think so.

Winter is the vice chair of Food Science and Technology at the University of California at Davis, and one of the researchers who did a deep dive into the Dirty Dozen list. The results, published in the Journal of Toxicology, found that the list lacks scientific credibility.

"Foods on the Dirty Dozen list pose no risks to consumers due to the extremely low levels of pesticides actually detected

on those foods," Winter said.

Think of it this way. Pesticides may be present, but mere presence is not enough to cause harm. Winter explains that the first principle of toxicology is that "the dose makes the poison"; it's the amount of a chemical, and not its presence or absence that determines the potential for harm.

Plus, some pesticides are more toxic than others, but they are all treated equally in

the Environmental Working Group's ranking system, which makes for a weak comparison. Unfortunately, that information is not making its way to consumers, who believe that any amount and any type of pesticide is bad news.

Even though the Dirty Dozen foods do have pesticides, Winter says "actual exposure levels are typically millions of times lower than those that are of health concern."

"The methodology used to

rank produce items on the Dirty Dozen list was seriously flawed as it failed to consider the three most important factors used in authentic risk assessments — the amounts of pesticides found, the amounts of the foods consumed, and the toxicity of the pesticides," Winter said. "When we consider these factors, foods on the Dirty Dozen list are clearly safe to consume."

Even the Environmental Working Group doesn't recommend avoiding the items on its own Dirty Dozen list. Their website says "the health benefits of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables outweigh the risks of pesticide exposure. Eating conventionally grown produce is far better than skipping fruits and vegetables." That should be the key message that everyone hears in 2017.

Vegetables and fruit account for 43 percent of U.S. organic food sales, so it's a big industry. And organic vegetables are healthy — no doubt. Some studies show that they have more of certain vitamins and

minerals compared with conventionally grown produce, and the farming methods may be better for the planet. If organic items are affordable, available and preferable to you, buy them.

But organic food isn't necessarily pesticide-free either, Winter explained. "Studies have indicated that as much as one quarter of organic fruits and vegetables may contain pesticide residues."

But remember, as is the case with conventional fruits and vegetables, the pesticide levels are not high enough to be a health concern.

So, the bottom line remains: The best thing you can do is consume lots of vegetables and fruit for their health benefits, whether you choose to buy organic or not.

Registered dietitian Cara Rosenbloom is president of Words to Eat By, a nutrition communications company specializing in writing, nutrition education and recipe development. She is the co-author of "Nourish: Whole Food Recipes featuring Seeds, Nuts and Beans."

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