

Scientists working towards developing universal flu vaccine

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Designing a flu vaccine that protects against a broad array of influenza viruses is going to be a tougher nut to crack than some might have thought, the findings of a new [study](#) suggest.

It's generally believed a so-called universal vaccine will need to trigger a production of antibodies — the immune system's ammunition — that [aim for a different target on flu viruses](#) than the current vaccines do. But the new research shows that people's previous experiences with influenza — both the viruses that make them sick and the vaccines that aim to prevent illness — limit their ability to produce that kind of antibody.

A universal flu vaccine is often referred to as influenza's Holy Grail. That's because these wily viruses mutate constantly, giving them the capacity to infect people multiple times over a lifetime.

In recent years the research into a universal flu vaccine has homed in on an approach experts hope might achieve the goal. They think by redirecting the vaccine's aim they can produce a product that is more effective and longer lasting.

Scientists are now looking to proteins called hemagglutinin on the surface of flu viruses. This protein is the part of the virus that latches onto cells in a person's respiratory tract, initiating infection. Hemagglutinins are shaped a bit like a lollypop — they have globe-like head attached to a stalk.

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