Is a universal flu vaccine ultimately unattainable?

If all goes according to plan, the annual flu shot protects about 60 percent of vaccinated people. This year's inoculation, of course, fell far short of such expectations, safeguarding only one in four vaccinated people who encountered the dominant H3N2 strain. This shortfall injected further momentum into the push to create a universal vaccine that protects against many flu types over time.

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"It's a scientific challenge because there are still so many things we don't know," says Anthony Fauci, director of the NIAID. And even if such a vaccine were developed, a perfect inoculation that protects against all flu types, is "unattainable," he says.

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[O]ne experimental vaccine, M-001, is headed into phase II clinical trials. Investigators will monitor its safety among adults as they assess whether it also appears to help them mount a clear defense against the flu virus.
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M-001 does not contain a whole inactivated flu virus like the current seasonal flu shot. It is also not an attenuated live virus vaccine (which is another experimental approach that has shown promise in lab animals). Instead, M-001 consists of nine epitopes—short stretches of viral protein—that were carefully selected because they are shared across many different influenza strains. The epitope-laden shot primes the body to recognize sites on flu viral proteins that do not change much across flu strains, so it can theoretically respond more effectively.

Read full, original post: A New Push for a Universal Flu Vaccine