WASHINGTON, D.C., July 25, 2019 – A new report released today by the Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group, a joint initiative of the Sabin Vaccine Institute and the Aspen Institute, calls for an urgent, coordinated effort to amplify and focus resources on the long-sought, but overdue achievement of a universal influenza vaccine (UIV). The report, titled “Accelerating the Development of a Universal Influenza Vaccine,” is the result of a 9-month effort from a cross-disciplinary group of 24 internationally recognized experts and innovators with experience in government, public health, industry, finance, philanthropy, and advocacy. With 300,000 to 650,000 people killed annually from influenza and millions of lives threatened by the emergence of a pandemic strain, influenza remains one of the world’s most serious infectious disease threats.

Designed to close the critical gaps in the organization, funding, and infrastructure of vaccine science and development, the report includes three “big ideas” to transform and accelerate the development of a UIV. Assessments of the current challenges and opportunities within the vaccine research and development ecosystem are detailed in the four background papers that frame the key findings of the report.

“The breakthroughs needed to eliminate the burden and threat of influenza will require a coordinated, singularly-focused effort on UIV development that leverages the combined resources of governments, industry, philanthropy, and academia,” said Harvey V. Fineberg, M.D., Ph.D., President of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and a Sabin-Aspen Group co-chair.
Among its key recommendations, the report calls for:

- Creation of an entity to spearhead accelerated development of a UIV
- Catalyzing the advancement of a transformational and innovative research and development agenda that broadens the range of scientific perspectives and resources in pursuit of a UIV
- Implementation of a communications strategy that reinforces the true potential impact of an influenza pandemic and the urgency of the need for a UIV

“To achieve the critical goal of a UIV, we must extend the range of scientific and technological capabilities and focus them on solutions to the intractable problems that to date have thwarted our success,” said Shirley M. Tilghman, president emerita of the university, professor of molecular biology and public affairs at Princeton University and Sabin-Aspen Group co-chair.

“We need all hands on deck to bring about a universal vaccine that can take the threat of influenza off the table,” said Bruce Gellin, M.D., M.P.H., Sabin’s president of Global Immunization and lead on influenza efforts. “We are excited to share this report, and proud of our partnership with The Aspen Institute and these leaders to bring innovative thinking to this critical issue.”

Vaccination provides the best way to prevent influenza infection, which is recommended annually. Even if it does not prevent influenza, your illness is likely to be less severe if you have received the vaccine. However, current vaccines and vaccination strategies are suboptimal. Each year, researchers can only make their best guess at vaccine formulation based on calculations of which strains are most likely to emerge. Today, it can take as long as a year to manufacture the vaccine, and the vaccine rarely covers all the strains circulating at the time of use. Underperformance from current vaccines combined with public under-appreciation of the true threat of influenza often contributes to low vaccination rates. The CDC estimates that during the 2017-2018 season, influenza vaccination coverage among adults in the United States was about 37%.

“Influenza poses a unique global disease threat—killing hundreds of thousands of people every year and threatening millions with a potential pandemic strain, the timing of which is completely unpredictable,” said Ruth Katz, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute Health, Medicine and Society (HMS) Program. “We need to take urgent and immediate steps to close the gaps in influenza vaccine development. We hope this report helps spur the efforts necessary to overcome these critical challenges.”

The Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group is a partnership which brings together senior leaders across many disciplines to examine some of the most challenging vaccine-related issues and drive impactful change. The inaugural meeting of the Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group and its research and report were funded by Flu Lab, a charitable organization focused on fueling bold approaches to defeat influenza.

Read the full Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group report.

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BACKGROUND

Influenza

- Influenza causes an estimated 290,000 to 650,000 deaths worldwide.
• In the U.S. during the 2017-2018 influenza season, approximately 79,000 people died from influenza.
• Each year, seasonal influenza costs the United States more than $10 billion in direct medical costs and more than $87 billion in total economic costs.

About Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group

Co-chairs
• Harvey V. Fineberg, President, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
• Shirley M. Tilghman, President Emerita of the University and Professor of Molecular Biology and Public Affairs, Princeton University

Members
• Ann Arvin, Lucile Salter Packard Professor of Pediatrics (Infectious Disease) and Professor of Microbiology, Stanford University School of Medicine; Vice Provost and Dean of Research Emeritus, Stanford University.
• Seth Berkley, Chief Executive Officer, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance
• Alan Bernstein, President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Institute for Advanced Research
• Tanisha Carino, Executive Director, FasterCures, Milken Institute
• Michael Conway, Senior Partner, McKinsey & Company
• Kathryn Edwards, Sarah H. Sell and Cornelius Vanderbilt Chair in Pediatrics and Professor of Pediatrics, Vanderbilt School of Medicine
• Mark Feinberg, President and Chief Executive Officer, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI)
• Margaret Hamburg, Foreign Secretary, National Academy of Medicine; President, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
• Penny Heaton, Chief Executive Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Medical Research Institute
• Rick Klausner, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Lyell Immunopharma
• Simon Levin, James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University; Director, Center for BioComplexity, Princeton Environmental Institute
• Diego Miralles, Chief Executive Officer, Vividion Therapeutics
• Kelly Moore, Adjunct Associate Professor, Health Policy, Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Member, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
• Katherine O’Brien, Director, Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals, World Health Organization
• Muhammad Pate, Global Director, Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice, World Bank; Director, Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents, World Bank Group
• Helen Rees, Founder and Executive Director, Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute, University of Witwatersrand
• Laura Riley, Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Weill Cornell Medicine and Obstetrician and Gynecologist-in-Chief, New York Presbyterian Hospital
• Pardis Sabeti, Professor, Center for Systems Biology and Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University and Department of Immunology and Infectious Disease, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University; Member, Broad Institute
of Harvard and MIT; Principal Investigator, Sabeti Lab, FAS Center for Systems Biology, Harvard University

- **George Siber**, Chief Scientific Officer, ClearPath Development Company
- **Michael Specter**, Staff Writer, *The New Yorker*
- **Wendy Taylor**, Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, The Rockefeller Foundation
- **Robert Tepper**, Co-Founder and General Partner, Third Rock Ventures, LLC

**About the Sabin Vaccine Institute**

The Sabin Vaccine Institute is a leading advocate for expanding vaccine access and uptake globally, advancing vaccine research and development, and amplifying vaccine knowledge and innovation. Unlocking the potential of vaccines through partnership, Sabin has built a robust ecosystem of funders, innovators, implementers, practitioners, policy makers and public stakeholders to advance its vision of a future free from preventable diseases. As a non-profit with more than two decades of experience, Sabin is committed to finding solutions that last and extending the full benefits of vaccines to all people, regardless of who they are or where they live. At Sabin, we believe in the power of vaccines to change the world. For more information, visit [www.sabin.org](http://www.sabin.org) and follow us on Twitter, @SabinVaccine.

**About the Aspen Institute**

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC and Aspen, Colorado. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. Established in 2005, the Institute’s Health Medicine and Society Program brings together influential groups of thought leaders, decisionmakers, and the informed public to consider health challenges facing the U.S. in the 21st century and to identify practical solutions for addressing them. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/health-medicine-and-society-program](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/health-medicine-and-society-program).

**About Flu Lab**

Flu Lab envisions a world free from the dangers of influenza. Through experimentation, learning and partnerships, our objective is to be a source of innovation in the fields of influenza and public health. Flu Lab is a charitable organization investing in a portfolio of activities that are designed to create actionable knowledge, stimulate cross-sector collaborations, and mobilize stakeholders to achieve transformative changes. For more information, visit [www.theflulab.org](http://www.theflulab.org).