

Ebola/Flu Infographic Data and Methodology

October 31, 2014

Ebola vs. Flu – Which is More Likely to Make You Sick?

The many recent news stories on the threat of the Ebola virus to the American public have overshadowed news coverage on a common, but consistent fall and winter threat to the health of Americans—influenza, commonly known as the flu. AIR compared basic flu data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to Ebola data and conducted a Lexis Nexis search on news headlines in U.S. publications related to Ebola and flu from June 1, 2014 to October 31, 2014 to illustrate the disproportional amount of media coverage on Ebola and flu compared to the threat each virus poses to public health. As a result of the imbalance in coverage, the threat of Ebola is overemphasized, while the threat of flu is underemphasized. This analysis is not intended to be a complete data analysis of Ebola and flu media coverage, but rather serves as quick snapshot that takes the pulse of the sentiment of the media on these topics and the messages being delivered to the American public through the media.

Ebola Quick Facts (as of October 31, 2014):

Number of cases acquired in the U.S. and hospitalized – 2*

Number of deaths from cases acquired in the U.S. – 0*

Number of articles about “fear” of Ebola – 397¹

Flu Quick Facts:

Percentage of U.S. population that gets the flu each year – 5-20%²

Number of hospitalizations for flu per year - >200,000³

Number of U.S. flu deaths per year (1976-2006) – 3,000-49,000⁴

Number of articles about “fear” of flu – 13⁵

*Figures updated to reflect hospitalizations and deaths through November 18, 2014

¹ From a review of headlines obtained from a keyword search in Lexis Nexis (headline(ebola) AND headline(fear! OR panic) AND Ebola Virus Disease (an Index term in Nexis, check-box Relevancy: Major Terms only) AND United States (an Index term in Nexis, check-box Relevancy: Major Terms only)) of U.S. publications for the period of June 1, 2014-October 31, 2014, excluding articles with an international focus.

² <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm>

³ <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/hospital.htm>

⁴ <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

⁵ From a review of headlines obtained from a keyword search in Lexis Nexis (headline (flu OR influenza) AND hlead (fear! OR panic)) of U.S. publications for the period of June 1, 2014-October 31, 2014, excluding articles that were primarily about Ebola.