Reviewer's report

Title: Monitoring the level of government trust, risk perception and intention of the general public to adopt protective measures during the influenza A (H1N1) pandemic in the Netherlands

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Reviewer: Hye-Jin Paek

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This paper deals with an important and timely topic on emergency preparedness, particularly in the context of pandemic flu. The data are very strong in that they are collected from a large, nationally representative sample of adults and repeated three times. In addition, the data were collected during the actual pandemic flu, unlike other studies that were conducted in hypothetical situations. However, I have a few major and minor concerns that need to be addressed for further publication consideration.

First, I just mentioned several strengths of the paper, but these were not clearly highlighted in it. The strengths are sparsely mentioned in Method and Discussion. The purpose of the study statement on page 4 does not sound innovative and new compared to what the data can actually offer. The authors should more clearly state in the INTRO what this study can add to and how it’s different from existing literature.

Second, the authors should more thoroughly review existing literature. For example, there was a special issue on crisis and emergency risk communication for pandemic influenza (Health Promotion Practice, volume 9 (4), 2008). A study published in that issue dealt extensively with multidimensional trust in government and public support for government actions. Thus, before the authors claim that “little research has been done…,” I encourage them to review more existing literature.

Third, my major concern is about the methodology. For one, despite the fact that the authors promise “time trend analysis” (abstract and also p. 10) there is no indication that they actually performed longitudinal analysis or time series analysis. Thus, the paper falls far short of what the data can offer. Without longitudinal analysis, this paper does not add much to existing knowledge in the pandemic flu literature (again, see the 2008 HPP special issue). In addition, the paper does not deliver what it promised to deliver—e.g., “Time trends in government trust, risk perception, intention to adopt protective measures, and the acceptance of vaccination were analysed” (Abstract).

Related, although the authors admit that the survey was designed without a theoretical framework, some measurement is still questionable. The authors need to think more carefully about how to operationalize and label some
variables—e.g., can fear, worry, and vulnerability be considered together as “risk perception”? Should hearing or reading about how to prepare for the new influenza be labeled as “information”? Also, I suggest that the authors use an averaging index of government trust instead of a summative index because the summative index is likely to increase variability and thereby inflate statistical significance. I do not know about the journal’s policy on appendices, but it may be better to include question wordings (even briefly) for the variables (with clearer labels) in the Methods.

Lastly, the paper needs a bit more careful editing and refining. Abstract should clearly address the purpose of the study. And some arguments in Discussion do not make sense—e.g., “On the contrary, fear and worry remained stable and low during the entire pandemic. This is an appropriate attitude as the disease indeed presented itself al mild throughout the pandemic period” (p. 9) —fear and worry are not “attitudes,” and I wasn’t sure what these two sentences mean.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests