

Overview | A major flu revival imminent?

How likely is a resurgence in seasonal respiratory viruses this winter?

- ✓ *Experts suggest people have lost their natural immunity to the common flu virus, potentially meaning a big bounce in flu levels*
- ✗ *This may be countered to a degree by improved hygiene practices, with mask-wearing, social distancing, washing hands, etc. helping suppress the spread of viruses*

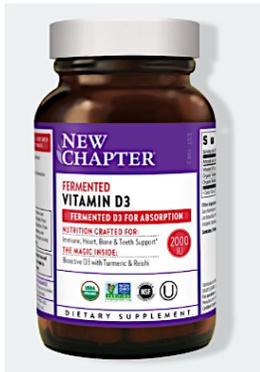
- Cough & cold season was historically weak in 2020/21 (see sidebar below)
- With lockdown restrictions, increased hygiene measures and social distancing in force for over a year to reduce the risk of contracting Covid-19, the incidence of common respiratory viruses has been very low
- However, with the lack of exposure to illnesses (especially among young children), many people have not built up antibodies, meaning immune systems may have been inadvertently weakened
- This has prompted warnings of a potential surge in influenza with reports from UK and USA suggesting a severe cold & flu season may be in store during winter 2021-22
- Data from UK's Office of National Statistics show that in the week ending 11th June, 84 death certificates issued in England & Wales mentioned Covid, while 1,163 deaths involving flu and pneumonia were registered
- Additionally, a study by Houston Methodist Research Institute shows the rapid re-emergence of seasonal respiratory viruses following the relaxing of Covid-19 restrictions in Texas in March 2021



Usual flu & respiratory viruses absent during Covid pandemic

Cases of flu and other respiratory viruses were significantly reduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to research presented at the virtual European Congress of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases (9-12 July 2021). In a retrospective study, Wayne State University researchers compared PCR test results for various infections, such as influenza A and B and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). In the 2019-2020 season, 11.5% and 12.4% of influenza A tests, 13.1% and 20.2% of influenza B tests and 9% and 23.7% of RSV tests were positive in adults and children respectively. In the 2020-2021 season, all flu and RSV tests were negative in adults and children with the exception of one positive RSV test in a child.

Vitamin D | US vitamin D sales rocket in 2020 thanks to immunity link



- **New Chapter Fermented Vitamin D3** (P&G; November 2019), featuring fermented vitamin D3 for enhanced absorption, and positioned to support strong bones and teeth, healthy immune function and heart health
- **TB12**, the performance lifestyle brand founded by NFL star Tom Brady, was extended – in partnership with Atrium Innovations / Nestlé – in 2019 with a line of nutritional supplements that are NSF-certified for sport, including **TB12 Vitamin D**, positioned to support the immune system and muscle recovery



CRN launches Vitamin D & Me!

- The CRN Foundation launched “Vitamin D & Me!” (vitamindandme.org), a consumer education initiative on vitamin D and Covid-19, in May 2021
- It presents research, expert video interviews and news in a user-friendly format developed by CRN member Nutrasource, focusing on consumers aged 55+ years; older adults are more prone to vitamin D deficiency and are at higher risk from worse outcomes from Covid and other respiratory infections
- The website features a section on “Vitamin D: Immune Health, Levels, and Intake”, in which the CRN supports vitamin D’s link to immune health (*see right*)
- CRN Foundation President, Steve Mister, stated “we have been fascinated... at the amount of research being conducted examining the potential relationship between vitamin D and Covid-19. [We are] delivering unbiased education on the latest science, which helps people make smarter decisions to maintain their health”



The most recognized roles for vitamin D in supporting a healthy immune system include reinforcing the barrier provided by epithelial cells (like skin cells), enhancing the cell’s ability to produce vitamin D at the site of infection, increasing other key defenses of innate immunity and decreasing inflammatory markers. At the site of infection vitamin D has antibacterial and antiviral benefits.¹²⁻¹⁴ Vitamin D influences some of the genes involved in the innate and adaptive immune systems and in inflammation and therefore affects susceptibility to and severity of bacterial and viral infections.^{15,16}

Foods & beverages | Brands for immunity seeing rapid expansion

With soaring consumer interest, immune health opportunity is being fully exploited by food & drink brands

- 6 of 10 global consumers are increasingly looking for food & beverage products that support their immune health (*Innova Consumer Survey 2020*), with 1 in 3 saying concerns about immune health increased in 2020 over 2019
- Improving immune function was a top priority for consumers even before Covid pandemic, e.g. 87% of those surveyed in 2017 expressed interest in purchasing beverages and foods with immune-health benefits (*Mintel's Nutrition and Performance Drinks – US*, March 2017)
- **Immunity-boosting ingredients like turmeric, green tea, garlic, honey and citrus fruits are being added to foods & beverages in recognition of their contribution towards a well-functioning immune system**
- Diverse range of products are explicitly adding immunity positioning, claiming “Immune support” or similar on packaging
- According to Innova, immune support claims are focused on three food & drink categories:
 - **Babies & Toddlers (particularly milks)**
 - **Sports Nutrition (powders)**
 - **Dairy (drinking yogurts / fermented beverages)**
- Smaller but growing subcategories include soft drinks and hot beverages, with a particular interest in juice drinks and tea
- Convenience and low price point are key factors – unlike with supplements, consumers buying an immunity beverage are not committing to buying a 30-60-pill bottle at a premium price
- **BUT** industry bodies counsel caution – it is all too easy to fall into the trap of making unsupported health claims
- Brands must ensure that messaging accurately conveys all ingredient benefits, without embellishment / overclaiming; simple content with straightforward advice is the best approach

