

# Buyer beware: bogus flu meds are out there

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With flu rampant in the United States, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is warning consumers to be wary of over-the-counter products that promise to cure you of influenza, prevent it or reduce its

severity.

Sellers offering these products may make claims that are not accurate or safe, the FDA cautions.

"These products can be found online, including popular marketplaces, and in retail stores. They may be labeled as dietary supplements, foods, hand sanitizers, [nasal sprays](#) or devices," according to an FDA news release.

Fraudulent products also include some herbal teas, certain air filters and light therapies that claim to prevent or cure the flu, or treat symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches and congestion.

Putting faith in these bogus products might cause people to delay, forgo or stop the medical treatment they need, leading to serious and life-threatening harm, the FDA warned. The ingredients could also cause side effects and interactions with other medications people may be taking.

Websites selling these products may appear to be online pharmacies selling prescription drugs.

Legitimate online pharmacies do exist, but so do many websites that look like safe online pharmacies and are actually fraudulent.

Visit the FDA's [BeSafeRx](#) campaign to learn how to safely buy prescription medicines online.

Even homeopathic products require some caution, and none are FDA-approved. They are generally labeled as containing very small amounts of highly diluted substances, including ingredients from plants, animal or human sources, bacteria, minerals and chemicals.

Some of these products contain active drug ingredients in levels that far exceed the amount stated on the product's label, the FDA warned. This could cause significant harm to children.

## The best protection

The best way to actually protect yourself from the flu is with an annual flu vaccine. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the vaccine for everyone ages 6 months and older. This is especially important for those at risk of complications, including young children, adults 65 years and older and those with chronic medical conditions.

The FDA has also approved some antiviral medications to treat the flu. These are only available by prescription and work best within 48 hours of symptoms starting. Products are all approved for both adolescents and adults, and some are available for children as young as 2 weeks old. They come in a variety of pills, liquids, inhalers and [intravenous infusion](#).

Antiviral medications can make illness milder. Talk to your health care professional if you have been near a person with the flu or if you think you have the flu.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [seasonal flu vaccines](#).

SOURCE: U.S. Food and Drug Administration, news release, Dec. 13, 2022

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