

Can over-the-counter cold medicine treat COVID-19?

March 18 2024



Credit: Tima Miroshnichenko from Pexels

Research by Cardiff University shows that over-the-counter cold and flu treatments are safe and effective for managing mild COVID-19 symptoms at home and could help alleviate the burden on hospitals

during high incidence of the illness in the population.

The study, led by Ron Eccles, emeritus professor in the School of Biosciences, found that medicines used to treat cold and [flu symptoms](#)—such as [pain relief](#), fever reducers, decongestants and cough suppressants—can also be used to manage mild COVID-19 infection at home despite not being licensed for such. The study is [published](#) in the journal *Clinical Infection in Practice*.

Professor Eccles, said, "The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the deaths of over 6 million people. Currently, with increased exposure of the world population to COVID-19 virus and mass vaccination programs, this serious disease, in the majority of the population, is now considered to have evolved into a much milder disease resembling a common cold or flu-like illness that can be treated at home.

"Over-the-counter (OTC) treatments for cold, flu and upper respiratory tract infections can help alleviate symptoms such as fever, muscle aches, cough, [runny nose](#), [sore throat](#) and [nasal congestion](#)—many of the symptoms associated with mild COVID-19 infections. But currently, over-the-counter medicines are only licensed for treatment of common cold and flu symptoms and not for treatment of the same symptoms associated with COVID-19."

The team—comprised of experts in respiratory viruses from Cardiff University, Université Laval in Quebec, University of Hong Kong, University of Utah and the University of Missouri School of Medicine—undertook a literature review and examined their own databases to understand whether over-the-counter cold and flu treatments are safe and effective treatments for the same symptoms associated with COVID-19.

They found that cold and flu-like symptoms associated with COVID-19

could be relieved by OTC medicines, and that it is reasonable for these medicines to be licensed by the [regulatory authorities](#) to treat these symptoms, regardless of the virus causing them.

Professor Eccles added, "The success of the mass COVID-19 vaccination programs and exposure to the virus means that most people will experience COVID-19 as a mild infection that can be managed at home, it's important that people know how best to manage their symptoms at home, safely and effectively.

"However, there has been some speculation that over-the-counter treatments such as ibuprofen used to treat fever may worsen the outcome of COVID-19. The data we analyzed doesn't appear to support ibuprofen worsening COVID-19 outcomes, and more recent studies indicate that [treatment](#) with ibuprofen may improve the outcome by suppressing the inflammatory response."

"Our research confirms that over-the-counter common cold and flu treatments can be used for mild symptoms of COVID-19, so we can ensure people reach for the correct treatments when recovering from COVID-19 infection at home."

More information: Ronald Eccles et al, Treatment of COVID-19 symptoms with over the counter (OTC) medicines used for treatment of common cold and flu, *Clinical Infection in Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.clinpr.2023.100230](#)

Provided by Cardiff University

Citation: Can over-the-counter cold medicine treat COVID-19? (2024, March 18) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-03-counter-cold-medicine-covid.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.