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State of the Industry Report

The Triple Threat: Covid, Flu, RSV

New Vaccines and Medications Aim to Reduce Infection and Length of Illness

By Amanda Baltazar

Concern about respiratory illnesses surges every year for Americans, starting in the fall and continuing through the winter. Along with the common cold, there are concerns about the three most prevalent viruses: Covid-19, the flu and RSV.

There have been numerous things happening in this space, which has also been getting a lot more attention since the pandemic. New drugs and new vaccines are being approved to prevent the diseases or lessen their severity.

COVID-19

Protection against Covid-19 began with vaccines in 2021, to lessen Americans' chances of getting the disease as well as reducing the severity of symptoms if they do. These come from manufacturers Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax.

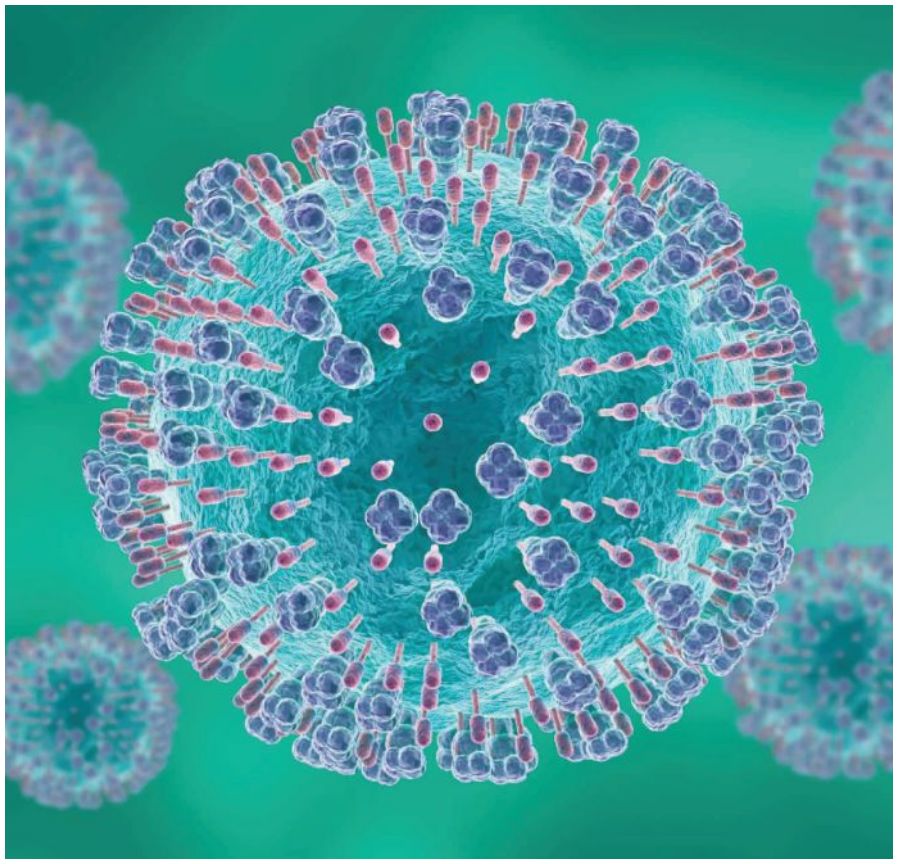
Oral antiviral medications are now also available for consumers to treat Covid at home. Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir) and Lagevrio (molnupiravir) are both available with a prescription.

The FDA approved Paxlovid from Pfizer in May 2023 and it must be started within five days of the onset of Covid symptoms. The FDA has not yet approved Lagevrio from Merck but has authorized it for emergency use under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). It is intended for patients over 18 who cannot take Paxlovid and are at risk for progression to severe Covid.

Pemivibart (Pemgarda) is a prophylactic medicine, a monoclonal antibody designed to prevent infection with Covid-19. The FDA has approved it for emergency use under an EUA, and it is specifically intended for people who are immune-compromised and thus less likely to respond to COVID vaccinations.

Influenza (Flu)

The 2025-26 flu season was severe, and the vaccines only 30% effective, according to Dr. Gary Kaplan, DO, founder and president of Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine in McLean, Va. "This year we missed," he says.



And in a surprise move this past February, the FDA first refused to review an application from Moderna to review its first mRNA seasonal flu vaccine, then reversed its position a week later, saying it would review it for possible approval.

Before it did this, Moderna opted to separate its approval into two parts: Standard approval for consumers aged 50 to 64 and accelerated approval for Americans aged 65 and older.

Pfizer is also developing an mRNA vaccine for the flu. Studies suggest these vaccines may be more effective than those on the market currently.

Also, in the pipeline is an INNA-051 nasal spray from ENA Respiratory. This is designed to be "virus agnostic" and prevent infections from flu, Covid and colds and began clinical trials in February. This nasal spray, once used, triggers an immune response in the body, aiming to reduce disease incidence and severity.

Older drugs like Zofluza and Tamiflu are still available to patients, as well as the newer FluMist, a nasal spray vaccine that's self-administered (or caregiver-administered) to prevent flu. This was approved for home use in September 2024, for patients aged two to 49. Older patients' immune systems may be less robust and would benefit more from traditional vaccines.

RSV

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a common and highly contagious virus that causes respiratory tract infections. The first vaccine for RSV was approved in 2023 but more recently the FDA approved Enflonsia (clesrovimab) from Merck in June 2025. To treat infants, Enflonsia is a preventive, long-acting monoclonal antibody designed to provide protection against RSV for five months, or a typical RSV season.

For adults, there are three vaccines – Arexvy from GSK, Abrysvo from Pfizer and mResvia from Moderna. These were all approved first for consumers aged 60 and up, but the approval for each extended a year later to patients aged 18 to 59. The latest to be approved was mResvia, approved in June 2025.

As of last December, Palivizumab is being phased out. This monthly injection is deemed much less effective and harder to administer than the new longer-acting alternatives.

Next up, there's excitement surrounding Ziresovir (AK0529), an oral antiviral in late-stage clinical trials to treat young children and infants. This medication, from Shanghai Ark Biopharmaceutical Co., prevents the virus from entering human cells and stops cell-to-cell spread.

In January, Shionogi announced that its oral antiviral S-337395, for RSV had achieved its primary endpoint in a Phase 2 clinical trial. This medicine is aimed at high-risk adults, to prevent hospitalization. The pill, which is taken daily for five days, inhibits the activity of the L protein, which is essential for virus replication.

And finally, Remdesivir, an antiviral from Gilead Sciences, which is already used to treat Covid-19, is in Phase II clinical trials to see if it can also prevent the spread of viruses in children hospitalized with RSV.

Dr Kaplan expects to see some "exciting "major breakthroughs" in the next two to three years, to treat these illnesses. Doctors are using better and earlier testing techniques to pinpoint which disease patients have, so they can tailor medications accordingly, he says. "The more precise we can be at treating something, the better."

And the sooner medications can get to work, the more improved the outcome, he explains, ideally within two to five days from the onset of the illness. After that it enters an inflammatory stage and drugs are less effective. **DSM.**

The Threat of Pneumonia

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The triple threat of Covid, flu and RSV is high in the winter, but all three have the possibility of turning into another disease: Pneumonia. This disease can also be caused independently of any other, too.

There are two forms of pneumonia: Viral, which is usually the less severe, occurs when a virus attacks a patient's lungs. Bacterial pneumonia is usually more serious, is more common and is caused when bacteria in the throat, often due to Covid, flu or RSV, travels into the lungs and causes a secondary infection – often known as "stage two" of the other three viruses. Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial pneumonia.

Bacterial pneumonia often leads to hospitalization, says Dr. Kaplan. "If you get flu, your immune system is weakened so it makes you more susceptible to getting a bacterial infection on top of it. So we need to target that because bacterial pneumonias kill."

The FDA approved Capvaxive from Merck in June 2024 to treat invasive pneumococcal disease and pneumonia. Pneumococcal pneumonia is a specific type of bacterial pneumonia caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae. DSM.