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# Non-Foods MANAGEMENT

## OUR EXCLUSIVE 2026-2027 ANNUAL SUPERMARKET State of the Industry Report

# A Focus on Respiratory Diseases

## New Treatments for Covid, Flu and RSV

By Amanda Baltazar

Ever since the arrival of Covid-19 in 2020, consumers have been paying more attention to respiratory diseases and the medications and vaccinations available to prevent them and decrease their severity.

The three major respiratory diseases, Covid, flu and RSV, are being treated better now, says Dr. Gary Kaplan, DO, founder and president of Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine in McLean, Va., because doctors are testing early, to discover exactly which one a patient has, "so we can target our therapies precisely. We need to treat Covid completely differently to how we treat the flu. And we're faster at diagnosing it. The more precise we can be at treating something, the better."

This year there are several new therapies on the market and over the next two to five years, Dr Kaplan expects to see some "exciting "major breakthroughs", to treat these illnesses. AI, he says, will drive much of that "because it can crunch bigger data sets, and allows us to model things we couldn't model before."

And time is of the essence with antiviral medications, he says. "We want to be in a two- to five-day interval from the onset for the disease. After that we're in an inflammatory stage and they don't work as well."

## Influenza (Flu)

Flu is a common disease with around a billion cases globally per year and up to 650,00 deaths worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

Vaccines typically only prevent only 40% 60% of the disease in the best-matched seasons, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The 2025-2026 flu season was particularly severe, and the vaccines only 30% effective, according to Dr. Kaplan.

But Moderna and Pfizer are working to develop the first mRNA seasonal flu vaccines. Studies suggest these may be more effective than those on the market previously.

However, Moderna received a temporary setback in February, when the FDA first refused to review its application for the vaccine, then just a week later, decided it would.

In between these two decisions, 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.

Nasal sprays are also emerging to treat the flu. Already available is FluMist, a vaccine, that the FDA approved in September 2024, for self-administration. This is only approved for patients aged two to 49 because more mature patients are believed to benefit more from traditional vaccines due to less robust immune systems.

In the pipeline to treat influenza is ENA Respiratory's INNA-051 nasal spray. This is said to be "viral agnostic" and also prevent Covid and colds. Clinical trials for this spray began this past February. INNA-051 triggers an immune response which reduces the incidence and severity of the flu, Covid or a cold.

## Covid-19

There have been vaccines to protect against Covid-19 since 2021, from three manufacturers Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax. Consumers can now also treat Covid at home with prescription oral antiviral medications, Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir) and Lagevrio (molnupiravir).

In May 2023, the FDA approved Pfizer's Paxlovid. To be effective, patients must start taking this medication within five days of the onset of any Covid symptoms. The FDA has also authorized Lagevrio from Merck for emergency use under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) but it is not fully approved. Lagevrio is designed to be used by adults over age 18 who cannot take Paxlovid and whose Covid could progress to severe status.

The FDA has also authorized Pemivibart (pemgarda) for emergency use under an EUA. This prophylactic medicine is a monoclonal antibody designed to prevent infection with Covid-19, specifically for immune-compromised patients who are less likely to respond to Covid vaccinations.

## RSV

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is another respiratory illness that leads to symptoms similar to a cold, and it can last for one to two weeks. RSV is highly contagious.

In June 2023 the FDA approved the first vaccine for RSV: Arexvy, from GSK was approved for Americans aged 60 and above. For adults, there are now three vaccines – Arexvy, Abrysvo from Pfizer, mResvia from Moderna. First approvals were for those aged 60-plus but a year later the approvals were extended to patients aged 18 and older.

In June 2025 the FDA approved Enflonsia (clesrovimab) from Merck, for infants. This preventive, long-acting monoclonal antibody provides protection against RSV for five months, or a typical RSV season.

Two oral antivirals are in the works. Ziresovir, (AK0529) from Shanghai Ark Biopharmaceutical Co., is in Phase 3 trials to treat children and infants. It works by preventing the RSV virus from entering human cells and so far, trials show a 77% reduction in viral load after 96 hours when compared to placebo.

S-337395 from Shionogi is designed to treat high-risk adults to prevent hospitalization. In a Phase 2 randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind clinical trial, a treatment group's viral load was showed to be significantly reduced compared to placebo. Patients take the pill daily for five days, and it inhibits the activity of the L protein, which is essential for virus replication.

One more drug is in clinical trials to see if it can prevent the spread of RSV viruses in children. Remdesivir is an antiviral from Gilead Sciences that is already approved to treat Covid. **NFM.**

### Pneumonia, or the "Stage Two" Disease

The threat of pneumonia looms for people infected with Covid, flu or RSV. All three of these diseases can turn into pneumonia, although it can be caused separately, too.

Of the two types of pneumonia, viral is the less severe and affects a patient's lungs. Bacterial pneumonia is more common and more serious and is caused by bacteria in the throat – often due to Covid, flu or RSV – traveling into the lungs where it sets up a secondary infection. Bacterial infection is treated with antibiotics.

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

In June 2024, the FDA approved Merck's Capvaxive to treat invasive pneumococcal disease and pneumonia. Pneumococcal pneumonia is a specific type of bacterial pneumonia caused by streptococcus pneumoniae. **NFM.**

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