

Natural medicines not FDA approved

BY CARLA K. JOHNSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Standing inside a downtown Chicago chain drugstore, shopper Beth McClanahan considered the product Zicam.

"I wouldn't have known it was homeopathic," she said looking at the bright orange label. "The name Zicam sounds very scientific."

Stuffy noses and sore throats are driving many cold sufferers to herbal and homeopathic remedies. But like McClanahan, consumers may not realize they're buying alternative medicines when they choose wildly popular products such as Airborne and Zicam — both shelved alongside traditional medicines in the cold and flu aisles of chain drugstores.

The makers of both medicines have paid for their own clinical studies to test their products. But Airborne and Zicam have not been reviewed for safety and effectiveness by the Food and Drug Administration, unlike prescription and new over-the-counter drugs. The law allows their sale unless the FDA proves them harmful.

That concerns some experts.

"I think it's quite confusing for consumers to try to sort out which things have some data showing they actually work," said Dr. Ronald B. Turner, a cold virus expert at the University of Virginia School of Medicine in Charlottesville.

Zicam and other homeopathic products do say on their packaging that they are homeopathic. Zicam is the nation's third leading nasal spray. Airborne is an effervescent tablet containing Chinese herbs, vitamins and echinacea. Its label notes that the FDA has not reviewed its language saying it should be taken at the first sign of cold symptoms.

For drugstore operators, it makes sense to place the remedies where consumers can find them quickly. For the manufacturers, marketing to a wider audience means more sales.

"There's a reason for the success of these products. Consumers want them and they're effective," said Rider McDowell, co-founder of the company that created Airborne.

Herbal products and homeopathic remedies are regulated separately, and the law lays out only a few quality controls and labeling rules.

Cold sufferers try herbal remedies

Homeopathic and herbal cold remedies are becoming popular alternatives to traditional over-the-counter drugs, which are approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Unit sales* of over-the-counter cold remedies, 2004

(Homeopathic in bold)			COLD/ALLERGY/ SINUS LIQUID/ POWDER		
COUGH/SORE THROAT DROP	UNIT SALES*	PCT. CHG. YEAR AGO	UNIT SALES*	PCT. CHG. YEAR AGO	
Halls	24.27	-10.7%	Vicks Nyquil	6.32	-10.5%
Ricola	10.99	-5.4%	Tylenol Plus	3.63	+24.2%
Ludens	7.46	-17.3%	Benadryl	2.86	-0.7%
Cold-Eeze	2.90	+6.3%	Sudafed	0.66	-2.4%
Airborne	0.21	+286.0%	Zicam	0.35	+149.5%

* In millions

Percentage of adults using herbal remedies, 2002

Echinacea	40.3%	Garlic supplements	19.9%
Ginseng	24.1%	Glucosamine with or without chondroitin	14.9%
Ginkgo biloba	21.1%	St. John's wort	12.0%

SOURCES: Information Resources Inc.; National Health Interview Survey, 2002 AP

Mild flu season may still get worse

BY DANIEL YEE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — After the panic last fall over the vaccine shortage, the flu season is milder than last year's severe bout, but it may not have peaked yet, the government said Thursday.

"It doesn't look like it's as severe as last year, but it's too early to tell," said Lynnette Brammer of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's influenza branch.

Last year, flu cases started early and rapidly hit a high point in December, clogging emergency rooms with flu sufferers. By the end of that season, 153 children had died from the flu. So far this season, nine children have died from the flu.

Flu cases this season did not start to increase until the end of December. As of Feb. 19, the latest data available, all 50 states have had at least one lab-confirmed flu case and 33 states have had widespread flu activity.

The outbreak could peak within the next two weeks, which would be somewhat later than usual, the CDC said. The season most often hits its peak in February.

But Brammer said later data may show that the season reached its height in February after all; the CDC will not be able to say for certain until it sees a drop-off in flu for a couple of weeks in a row.

The season began with fears of a vaccine shortage after a factory in England was shut down. The shutdown cut off half the U.S. supply of shots.

That prompted the government to recommend restricting the shot to only high-risk groups: babies, the elderly and those with chronic conditions.

But many states lifted those restrictions last month after they found that many of the shots were still unused and might go to waste. A flu shot can be used only during the season it is made for.

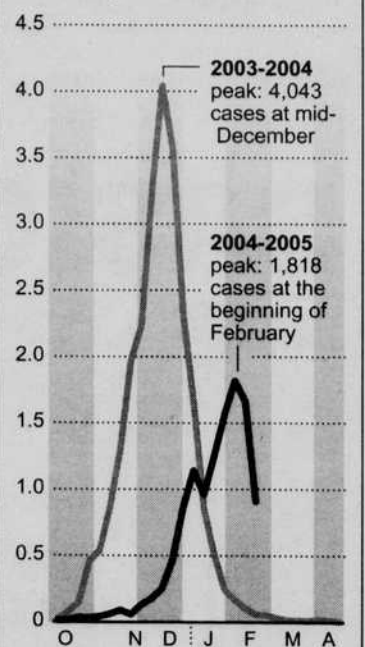
Each year in the United States, about 36,000 people die of the flu and 200,000 are hospitalized.

Milder flu season

This season flu cases did not start to increase until the end of December — the same month flu cases peaked last year. Flu season most often hits its peak in February.

Influenza diagnoses

Per week, in thousands



SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention AP

BUS SERVICE MAY CEASE ON MARCH 7th, 2005.

LTD Wants to Make Sure You Still Have a Way to Go.

As early as March 7th, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), Local 757, may go on strike. Lane Transit District (LTD) will not be able to operate bus service during the strike. Once a settlement has been reached, LTD will be committed to getting buses back on the road as quickly as possible. LTD's Guest Services office will be closed but if you call 687-5555 we will have staff to assist you.

What you can do:

- ▶ Register at ltd.org for **carpool-matching**. It's easy and fast. Sign up to drive as well as ride.
- ▶ **RideSource** will continue to run and serve those passengers who are eligible. We expect demand to increase significantly. Medical appointments may be given priority over other trips.
- ▶ Go to the **LTD website for information** on ways to get around including links to the City of Eugene for Bike Path Maps.

Please plan ahead. For further information, log onto www.ltd.org or call LTD at 687-5555.



Lane Transit District