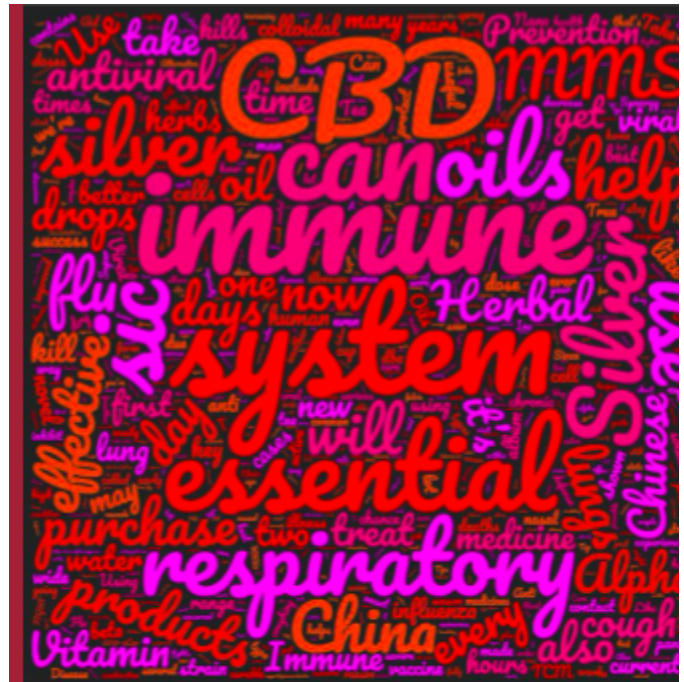




With Coronavirus closing shops and restaurants all over the country, Americans are spending more time communicating with friends digitally, engaging on social media, and shopping online. Alongside media engagement, concern over health and financial costs escalates to new heights with every new report.

Analysis of 34 FDA Warning Letters

- More than 1 in 6 warning letters were for products that claimed colloidal silver is effective in mitigating, preventing or curing Coronavirus. Twenty-one years ago the FDA warned that silver products have no adequately-proven benefits. That determination has not changed.
- Five warning letters were issued to Cannabidiol products with unsubstantiated claims related to how they treated, mitigated or cured the virus.
- More than half the FDA warning letters were issued to products (56%) claimed to either enhance immune systems or have antiviral properties that would prevent, mitigate, treat or cure COVID-19.



- # Product Red Flags in the Era of COVID-19

CALPIRG | California Public Interest Research Group



Silver or Colloidal Silver

Colloidal silver is a suspension of silver particles in a liquid and a common ingredient in many drug and dietary supplement scams. Of the 34 (and climbing) FDA warning letters issued to Coronavirus-related products, six advertised silver particles as effective agents in mitigating, preventing, or curing Coronavirus.

“Nano Silver is on record taking out viruses and bacteria” • “Colloidal silver is the key to protecting yourself from the corona virus” • “Colloidal silver is an excellent natural remedy for a variety of lung problems” • “ionic silver kills coronaviruses” • “The Silver is flying off the shelves” • “colloidal silver has killed coronavirus strains in past laboratory test” • “Colloidal Silver is still the only known anti-viral supplement to kill all seven of these Human Coronaviruses”

The major issue with these products—and any drugs containing silver that make disease claims—is that 21 years ago the FDA warned that silver products have no adequately-proven benefits. In 1999, the FDA issued a [final rule](#) to establish that all over-the-counter drugs containing colloidal silver ingredients are not recognized as safe or effective for treating any disease or condition and are misbranded. It’s safe to say that fraudulent silver products are making a comeback in the era of Coronavirus, with one seller facing a major [lawsuit](#) and garnering attention from late-night comedians.

Vague “Immune Boost” or “Antiviral” Claims

More than half (56%) of the FDA warning letters to Coronavirus products claim to have immune building, strengthening, supporting, boosting, or enhancing properties to treat or prevent Coronavirus. One fourth claim to have antiviral effects that do the same.



Silver Sol Liquid received a warning letter for unproven claims regarding this silver solution (Credit: FDA).

Do some immune-boosting or antiviral products make generally valid and proven claims? Yes.

Are those with compromised immune systems particularly vulnerable to Coronavirus? Yes.

Will a product that claims to have antiviral agents or boost your immune system definitely prevent COVID-19? [NO](#).

Is it entirely safe to purchase a product with immune-boosting or antiviral properties with the expectation that it will prevent or cure Coronavirus? [NO](#).

“CORONA VIRAL IMMUNE SUPPORT” • “Anti-Viral Agent for Coronavirus” • “PROVEN ANTI-VIRAL THAT COULD HELP FIGHT COVID-19” • “Don’t Fear the #CoronaVirus FIGHT it with us! Soap, immune boosting oils & more” • “powerful antiviral action helps kill off the infection” • “Crush Corona! Your best defense against the COVID-19 blitz starts with a strong immune system” • “Studies show anti-viral activity against [sic] Coronavirus” • “Is CBD An Anti-Viral Agent For Coronavirus?”

Even products with antiviral properties or immune-boosting agents [are unlikely to have a significant impact](#) preventing or treating Coronavirus. The manufacturers claim success with a range of diseases, and therein lies the issue: it is not scientifically sound to assume similarities that are unproven. The FDA's own [statement](#) asserts that products claiming to prevent or treat Coronavirus in any way "defraud consumers of money and can place consumers at risk for serious harm. Using these products may lead to delays in getting proper diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 and other potentially serious diseases and conditions."

Right now, the FDA can only regulate products that make explicit claims to prevent, mitigate, or cure Coronavirus. The agency has very little power when it comes to regulating dietary supplements that don't make disease claims, so there are many "immune-boosting" supplements online that will [multiply and spike](#) in price in the next few months.

Supplements that claim to prevent, mitigate, or cure Coronavirus are classified as [unapproved new drugs](#) under the FD&C Act, as [no drugs](#) have yet been approved for those purposes. If you decide to purchase a supplement that makes these claims, it may not be safe. As for supplements that do not make explicit disease claims: be sure to exercise caution if you're considering purchasing one with the expectation that it will protect you from Coronavirus.

Identifying Fraudulent COVID-19 Products

Testimonials

Products claiming to prevent, mitigate, or cure Coronavirus may try to win consumers over with testimonials.

"Here is the testimony of a man who was experiencing very serious symptoms of Coronavirus...He is recovering quickly—90% improved, has just a slight remnant of cough occasionally. The rest of the family who also took MMS are now fully recovered." • "Every week I am putting in the G2Sacramental dosing for Coronavirus, why . . . we have a family on it, we have a couple of other people . . . 6 drops MMS activated 4oz of water every two hours four or five times the first day, it should, it might even kick it out the first day."



FullerLifeC60 received a warning letter for unproven claims regarding their herbal product. (Credit: FDA).

Testimonies are difficult to prove, because they're based on the experience of one individual—not verified scientific evidence. A testimony could be completely made up, or represent a collection of personal cases passed from person to person. Even if the testimony is true, others may respond differently to the treatment. The FDA's Reynaldo Rodriguez is quoted on the Administration's [site](#) identifying testimonies as "the weakest form of scientific validity....It's just compounded hearsay."

Spelling Slips, Inconsistent Caps, and Rhetorical Questions

While FDA-approved drugs have been through drafting and editing processes to ensure they are effective and accurately described, fraudulent products have not. Spelling errors may slip through the cracks, and descriptions may employ grabby caps lock and rhetoric that tempts you to buy the product and find out.

"WHEN T cell function is LACKING", "ESSENTIAL OIL RESPIRATORY FORMULA – Soothing Support" "Corona Virus Prevention" "Strongly antiviral for corona viruses" "Top Compiled HOMEOPATHIC Remedies for Coronavirus" "CBD Anti Viral?"

When you're shopping online during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's safe to say that products claiming to prevent or cure "[the deadly coronavirus \[sic\]](#)" are a waste of your money. In our view, descriptors like "[the BEST DEFENSE you will ever find](#)" are often not reputable.

We believe a product description that asks the reader "[What if](#) you had a magic key to help keep your immune system strong and less likely to succumb to illness?" should not be your trusted source of Coronavirus counsel.

If the product description in any way reads like the script of a nonsensical mattress store commercial, our opinion is that you're better off spending your money on maintaining a balanced diet.

Who to Trust

As of April 28, 2020, "there are no drugs or other therapeutics approved by the US Food and Drug Administration to prevent or treat COVID-19" (CDC). Online shoppers should verify any product claiming to prevent or treat Coronavirus through the CDC and FDA websites, even if it claims to be approved. That means supplements or drugs like those above that you may come across when you're adding to your cart. To check on a product you're curious about, contact a health professional, check the distributor on the Better Business Bureau site, read up on COVID-19 on any reputable health organization's site (National Institutes of Health, World Health Organization), or call your state's FDA office.

If you're itching to research the latest studies on curing or preventing Coronavirus, the CDC is consistently updating a page for clinicians on Investigational Therapeutics for Patients with COVID-19.