

Benefits of OTC Medications to Treat URIs Fact Sheet

About the Study

- Purpose of the study was to compare the costs of upper respiratory infection (URI) treatment with over-the-counter (OTC) medications versus non-treatment
- Researchers created a decision analytic model incorporating a series of key factors associated with the treatment of URIs, including:
 - Impact on work productivity including lost time from work and on the job productivity losses
 - OTC medicine use and side effects
 - Physician care by phone and in office
 - Antibiotic use and side effects
 - Emergency department care
 - Hospital admission for complications of URI and complications of antibiotic use
- Costs were taken from average wholesale prices, MEPS 2001, Medicare payments and medical literature
- OTC medication use was \$9 per URI episode less expensive than non-treatment (\$184 compared to \$193)
- With an average of three URI episodes per year¹ among Americans age 18 to 65, this translates into potential savings of \$4.75 billion
- The study was conducted by researchers at Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, and sponsored by the Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA)

About Upper Respiratory Infections (URIs)

- URIs may be caused by a variety of factors including the common cold, acute bronchitis, influenza, and chronic or acute sinusitis
- Viruses cause the common cold, most coughs, and the flu while bacteria cause conditions like strep throat and bacterial sinus infections²
- While rarely serious, URIs may contribute to bothersome symptoms such as runny nose, fever, malaise, sore throat, headache, cough, and ear pain
- URIs are generally contagious and are spread by sneezing, coughing, and other contact
- Americans suffer from about 1 billion colds each year³
- Average adults suffer from two to four colds per year¹; some suffer from up to 12 colds per year³
- Approximately 15 million work days are lost each year in the United States due to the common cold³ and each episode results in a loss of 8.7 work hours⁴
- OTC medications are used to relieve the symptoms of viral URIs⁵

¹ American Lung Association. The Common Cold. Available at <http://www.lungusa.org/site/apps/s/content.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=34706&ct=67321>. Accessed Aug. 18, 2004.

² Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/files/CDC_parents_brochure1.pdf. Accessed Sep 27, 2004.

³ Food and Drug Administration. Colds and Flu: Time Only Sure Cure. Article originally appeared in the October 1996 *FDA Consumer*; updates to article made in March 1997, February 1998, and May 1999. Available at http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/896_flu.html. Accessed Aug. 18, 2004.

⁴ Bramely, T, Lerner, D, Sarnes, M. Productivity Losses Related to the Common Cold. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. 2002 Sept; 44 (9): 822-9.

⁵ National Library of Medicine. National Institutes of Health. MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia. Available at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000678.htm>. Accessed Sep 27, 2004.