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 Researchers say taking vitamin D supplements could prevent more than three million people in the UK from getting colds or flu each year. Sunshine is needed to produce the vitamin naturally in the skin, and levels plummet during the winter. The team, from Queen Mary, University of London, says the vitamin should be added to foods like bread.

Here's our health correspondent Dominic Hughes. This is what vitamin D deficiency can look like. Softened bones bowing under the weight of the body. In children it can cause rickets. But now researchers say vitamin D may have other benefits apart from strengthening bones. Effectively, vitamin D boosts the production of natural antibiotic substances called antimicrobial peptides, which are toxic to bacteria and viruses. We have shown the effects of vitamin D to prevent respiratory infections are on a par with those of the flu vaccine and that is a significant effect. They argue that if everyone got enough vitamin D there would be a 10% reduction in the risk of respiratory illnesses like coughs, colds and flu. Among those with the very lowest levels of vitamin D, the benefit is even greater, a 50% reduction. And across the whole UK population, that would equate to more than 3 million people avoiding a cold or flu each year. Sunlight on the skin is the best source of vitamin D but the increased use of sunscreen, and our weather, means exposure

in the UK is limited. It is possible to get vitamin D through some foods. For example, cereals, particularly those marketed at children, have vitamin D added as a supplement. You can also get it from oily fish or from eggs, although you would have to eat ten every day to ensure you got the right amount. What researchers are arguing is that vitamin D should be added as a supplement to products like milk so that we all get our fair share. But some scientists believe that fortifying food with vitamin D will not be enough. The recommendation is more around that we should all take a supplement in the winter months, in autumn, and in those groups that are at risk, so people with darker skin or who aren't outside as much, they should take them all year round. While the specific benefits of vitamin D are still being debated, sunshine and supplements seem to be the best sources. Let's speak to Doctor Lewis Levy, Head of Nutrition Health

at Public Health England. He joins us from our studio in Central London. and dull it seems logical to take littering the supplements but I'm -- to take vitamin D supplements. Our current advice is to protect bone health in the spring and summer we should go outside and eat a diet containing enough vitamin D. But in the winter when skin does not make vitamin D, it is important to eat foods that contain vitamin D or are fortified with it. But some people will have to take a supplement in order to get enough. Other people will have to take supplements all year round. People who do not go outside, older people in residential care, or people who cover up fully when the go had, they would not -- on the outside, they would need to take a ten micrograms supplement. We already have an approach to meet the

recommendations in the UK, this study does not change that advice. There are some concerns about this study in that it is influenced largely by a number of studies, on a small number of children who were actually unwell. So you are adamant this research we are talking about today is not enough to make you change your advice that you outlined, people should stick with the guidelines as they exist. Our current guidelines, on NHS choice, taking the approach we have already identified will help people meet their What Ever levels that during the summer 80% of the UK published already made those levels. That is interesting, there were quite a lot of people who might not realise they are in one of the categories you described where they would benefit from supplements if only at certain

times of the year. You think there is a question about people perhaps not realising they might benefit? If you don't get outside or you cover all of your skin when you go outside, you need to take a supplement. If you have a dark skinned you should consider it. In the autumn and winter if you're not eating oily fish, red meat, liver, eggs, fortified cereals, then you need to consider taking a supplement as well. That is a fairly easy thing for people to consider. It is on NHS choices for you to check. But what happened to people see the headlines, they do not look into it, just think I have just read it is not -- it is good to take more, is there any risks associated with that which Mark it is possible to overdose on vitamin D, so do take the supplement of ten micrograms.

For babies from birth until one year, it is 5-10, but only if they are not having 500 millilitres of formula, that is already fortified. If you are buying supplements during the winter months make sure it is ten micrograms. You can get much larger doses but it is difficult to overdose. Thank you very much indeed.