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More than three million people could avoid getting colds and flu every year by taking Vitamin D supplements, according to new research. The study in the British Medical Journal calls for the vitamin to be added to food. But Public Health England says the evidence remains inconclusive. Our health correspondent Dominic Hughes reports. 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 can have other benefits apart from strengthening bones. 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. At present, people are being asked to take supplements in order to meet their vitamin D requirement over winter and spring, but it's expensive and a lot of people won't be able to take or remember to take supplements daily, so a more effective strategy is to introduce food fortification into the food chain. 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. We are already advised to take vitamin D throughout the winter and spring months to boost our levels. It can also be found in some foods, like oily fish, eggs and cereals, and the US and Finland add vitamin D as a supplement to food.

But some scientists here are not yet convinced there is enough evidence that vitamin D can prevent other illnesses to justify following suit.