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**'Take vitamin D supplements to prevent colds and flu', experts warn**

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The Evening Standard

**More than three million people across the UK could stave off colds or flu if they took Vitamin D supplements, experts have said.**

The ‘sunshine vitamin’ is vital for bone and muscle health but a new study claims it also plays a role in preventing everyday illnesses.

Data from almost 11,000 participants, published in the British Medical Journal, suggests daily Vitamin D supplements can protect against respiratory infections – including the common cold.

Colds and flu are most common during winter and spring, when natural levels of vitamin D from sunshine are at their lowest.

At least 70 per cent of the population gets at least one acute respiratory infection every year, including earache, bronchitis and pneumonia.

The group of infections lead to 300,000 hospital admissions and 35,000 deaths across the UK every year.

The researchers, from Queen Mary University of London, found that vitamin D supplements cut the proportion of participants experiencing at least one acute respiratory tract infection by 12 per cent.

Lead researcher Professor Adrian Martineau said: "Assuming a UK population of 65 million, and that 70 per cent have at least one acute respiratory infection each year, then daily or weekly vitamin D supplements will mean 3.25 million fewer people would get at least one acute respiratory infection a year."

Experts said the study had implications for public health policy, including the possibility of fortification of foods with vitamin D to tackle high levels of deficiency in the UK.

Commenting on the study, Professor Louis Levy, head of nutrition science at Public Health England, said: "Based on evidence reviewed by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), we recommend that certain population groups take a daily 10 micrograms vitamin D supplement year round and everyone considers taking one during the autumn and winter months to protect musculoskeletal health.

"The evidence on vitamin D and infection is inconsistent and this study does not provide sufficient evidence to support recommending vitamin D for reducing the risk of respiratory tract infections."