

Can Essential Oils Help Prevent Swine Flu? The Science and the Recipes

With the news of potential pandemic influenza prevailing the airwaves, many folks are turning to natural medicines to support their immune system. There's great interest in protecting one's self and one's family from Swine Flu, Avian Flu and the like. Although there has not been any large-scale trials on influenza-prevention using natural methods, there IS a good amount of data on the anti-viral and immunostimulant activity of essential oils. (For those of you not in-the-know, essential oils are the concentrated, carefully-extracted volatile chemical constituents of plants and plant materials). Interestingly, it's been the position of many of the world's foremost aroma-medicine practitioners that the most medically important use of essential oils is for the treatment and prevention of infectious illness. Here's a review of the scientific data, some suggested antiviral recipes, and instructions to use these oils for yourself and your family.

The Supporting Data: Antiviral Actions of Essential Oils

Over the last decade, laboratory researchers around the world have found many essential oils are capable of directly eradicating viruses. Further, they may even prevent viruses from moving between cells within the body and limiting the spread of infection. This is not an over-optimistic interpretation of the data by an essential oil proponent, but the actual conclusions of controlled research studies. Abstracts of all the research mentioned here can be found through pubmed.gov, the database maintained by the National Institute of Health and the US National Library of Medicine. If you wish, you can browse these results by entering search terms such as "essential oil virus", "antiviral essential oil", and more specifically "Laurus nobilis SARS" (Laurus nobilis being Bay Laurel essential oil, and SARS a highly-infectious viral respiratory ailment). While there is not yet data where essential oils have been tested against Swine Flu and Avian Flu specifically, as we'll see there is every reason to believe the oils will be effective against these virus strains as well.

What Does the Data Mean?

With more than one hundred published research papers on the subject, a summary is in order. What scientists are finding is that many of the essential oils commonly in use today have antiviral properties. Whether an oil is effective against a particular virus depends upon the natural chemical makeup of the oil and the structure of the virus being studied. The data, without a doubt, is very encouraging. One study performed in Germany this year concluded with the note that Tea Tree was able to "reduce viral infectivity by greater than 96 percent". The same study went on to clarify that the whole, natural oil, rather than any single chemical synthetically extracted, was up to TEN TIMES more effective as an antiviral agent. The precise reason for this is not known -- it is clear that some of the most chemically complex oils exhibit the greatest antiviral effects, and perhaps this mixture of nature's chemicals attacks the virus AND supports immune function in several ways at once.

Laurus Nobilis and SARS

Many of the studies utilize the Herpes Simplex Virus as a "test subject", because of the widespread prevalence of infection, along with the relative ease of testing. However, if one digs into the data, many papers present information relevant in influenza pandemic. SARS 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome' is caused by the highly infectious SARS-CoV virus that made world-wide news in 2003. A study in the March 2008 Journal of Chemical Biodiversity noted Bay Laurel essential oil to have significant antiviral action against this virus. They'd also noted the natural constituents of this oil, which are also found in a great many other essential oils. This is why you'll see MANY essential oils noted as antivirals -- because many oils share similar natural chemical constituents. So while this next oil is not readily available, the data is very interesting. In 2005, Chinese researchers evaluated the anti-influenza potential of the essential oil from a root used in Chinese medicine, concluding: "In vivo...it prevented influenza virus-induced deaths in a dose-dependent manner". And the list of oil/virus combinations goes on and on. But this begs the question: how do we derive a formula for Swine Flu prevention?

Selecting Oils For Daily Flu Protection

It is this sharing of natural compounds that supports the literature's assertion that there are a great many oils in use today that are antiviral -- one reason you'll typically see several oils, not just one, in an antiviral formula. But which oils to use for your needs? This is where the long-time historical practice of aroma-medicine therapists helps us choose. The antiviral and immune-supportive essential oils have been categorized by the symptoms the infection produces. The Cineol-containing oils, like Eucalyptus and Ravensara are chosen where the bronchial system is affected. Melissa and Tea Tree are most commonly used for viruses infecting the skin -- though their antiviral action for other parts of the body should not be ignored, because their synergistic effects with other oils creates a formula with a complex mixture of natural chemicals -- similar in respect to the balance found in the single oil Bay Laurel. Other oils are highly regarded for their positive effect on the immune system overall: Frankincense is considered by some to be the most potent immunostimulant, and Melissa has this property as well.

An Influenza Prevention Recipe

A blend can be made using the following oils (and this complete formula can then be adapted to different applications as we'll see): 1 milliliter (ml) Melissa, 1/2ml Thyme, 2ml Lavender (use *Lavandula angustifolia*), 1 and 1/2 ml Ravensara aromatica, 2ml Eucalyptus Radiata, 1 and 1/2 ml Hyssop decumbens, 3 ml Maleleuca ericifolia and 3ml Laurus Nobilis (Bay Laurel). A simpler, yet still effective formula with a more gentle nature -- and more appropriate for children: 4ml Lavender, 3ml Melaleuca ericifolia, 1ml Ravensara, 1ml Eucalyptus, and 3ml Bay Laurel. While having a medicinal purpose, these blends do really smell wonderful as well.

How To Use The Oils for Influenza Prevention: Diffusion

The best way to use these oils is through diffusion, which is essentially "rapid evaporation". A nebulizing aromatherapy diffuser will make a fine mist of essential oil which cleanly evaporates in your surroundings. This method allows a low concentration of the oils to be inhaled regularly. The effect is to actually disinfect the air in your home, as well as getting the oils into one's lungs and bloodstream in small amounts. A feature of oils' activity is that they are reported to reduce the ability of viruses to penetrate cell walls, so the lungs and sinuses become protected just by breathing the oil-infused air. Be careful not to overdo it though -- the aroma should never be overwhelming or irritating, and your body will tell you if you've had enough. The oils do their immune-supportive job in subtle ways, which require only the smallest amounts of oil. The casual inhalation of the oils also gets them into circulation throughout the bloodstream, penetrating all the organ systems, and most importantly the lymph system -- home to our

immune function. A cold air nebulizing diffuser (as opposed to an 'ultrasonic', which dilutes the oils with water) would ideally be run 5-10 minutes every hour for this purpose. Aromatherapy Baths and The All Important Foot Massage Immune-protection topical oil blends can be easily mixed, putting the essential oil formula in a carrier oil such as Coconut or Jojoba. This concoction can then be massaged daily into the feet (a highly receptive area of the body) or into regions of lymph nodes: the neck, armpits and sternum. Adding the essential oils to a carrier at a 5 to 10% concentration is suitable (10% would be 1 part essential oil mixture to 9 parts carrier oil). If you'd like to use a topical formula for children, use the "childrens" recipe above, and lower the concentration in the carrier oil to 1% for ages 2-4, 2% for 5-7, 3% for 8-12 (a 1% concentration is 8 drops total essential oils in each fluid ounce of carrier, 2% is 16 drops per ounce, etc). Soaking in a bath with oils added to the water is also an excellent way to gain their benefits -- for young kids, add 2 drops essential oil to a teaspoon of ANY carrier oil (olive oil from the kitchen will do fine), then swirl this into the bath once it's been drawn. 4 drops essential oil blend for older children, and 6 drops for adults.

The Future of Aromatherapy: Aroma Medicine

As noted earlier, the world's leading aroma-medicine practitioners believe the most important healing potential for essential oils is in the prevention and treatment of infectious illness. Of course, one should evaluate every available means of strengthening their immune system and those of their loved ones -- there are many ways health professionals will recommend to do this. Considering the scientific data, essential oils are certainly a very worthy method of providing this support. Given all the contagions, Swine flu, Avian flu, and ones yet to be named, natural medicines have the long-term advantage of not being easily "adapted to" by viruses. The oils are so complex, and have evolved as the defense mechanism of plants over millions of years that they may present a far greater challenge to a virus to become resistant to when compared to synthetic preparations. And they're such a joy to use -- you're house will be smelling fantastic while you're keeping healthy; a great many amateur practitioners will concur that think you'll find essential oils very worthwhile.

Disclaimer: These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. They are not intended to treat, cure or prevent any disease. The statements included in this document are the opinions of natural health professionals drawing on historical therapeutic practices and relevant scientific data. They are not meant to be a substitute for face-to-face consultations with trained and licensed medical professionals. Essential oils are considered to be supportive of the immune system's actions by a great many health practitioners; at the same time, it is important to be aware of all the options available to you to make the best choices for your health and the health of your family.

About the Author

The author utilizes [pure essential oils](#) for aromatherapy. More information is available through The Ananda Apothecary at www.anandaapothecary.com.

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