

Bogus Coronavirus Claims For Silver, Essential Oils, Herbalist's Tea 'Protocol' Plus A Price Discount

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Executive Summary

Obviously unsubstantiated claims on how the products either prevent or cure the virus didn't escape FDA and FTC's attention -- they warned seven firms attempting to capitalize on consumer fears. They warnings are the "first step" and they plan to enforce action against companies that continue to market products with treatment claims.



COLLOIDAL VITALITY PROMOTED SOME OF ITS PURE VITAL SILVER PRODUCT LINE WITH CLAIMS ON ITS FACEBOOK PAGE THAT CHINA IS USING IONIC SILVER IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS.

Three months after coronavirus emerged as a global public health threat, "cures" being promoted to fearful US consumers include silver-based supplements that "attach" to the virus to render it ineffective and essential oils that "inhibit virus replication."

Some dietary supplement and natural health product firms are promoting purported coronavirus treatments by referencing a previous outbreak that frightened consumers worldwide, severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003. They're offering teas made with a combination of ingredients developed by an herbalist who claims to have developed an effective treatment for SARS.

Those and other obviously unsubstantiated claims – some described in technical detail – didn't escape the attention of the US Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission. The agencies sent joint warning letters to seven firms attempting to capitalize on consumer fears.

The agencies on 9 March announced the warning letters to supplement firms Colloidal Vitality LLC; Quinessence Aromatherapy Ltd.; Xephyr LLC dba N-Ergetics; GuruNanda LLC; and Herbal Amy LLC; Canadian osteopathic clinic Vivify Holistic Clinic; and to televangelist and convicted felon Jim Bakker's TV show.

The agencies say the warnings submitted on 6 March are only the "first step" as FDA and FTC plan to take enforcement action against companies that continue to market the products with treatment claims.

"There already is a high level of anxiety over the potential spread of coronavirus. What we don't need in this situation are companies preying on consumers by promoting products with fraudulent prevention and treatment claims," said FTC Chairman Joe Simons in a release.

The letters signed by Donald Ashley, FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research Office of Compliance director, and Richard Quaresima, associate director of the FTC Division of Advertising Practices Acting, advised each firm to within 48 hours contact the FTC division describing the specific actions they will take to address concerns.

The Consumer Healthcare Products Association encouraged the agencies to continue finding and warning firms making false Covid-19 claims.

The Council for Responsible Nutrition also suggested further enforcement while urging marketers and retailers "to be extra vigilant in preventing these products from ending up on shelves or e-commerce sites."

'Home Remedy' With 'No Vaccines' Available?

The FDA and the FTC note no vaccines, drugs or investigational products are approved or available to treat or prevent Covid-19, first detected in the Wuhan region of China in December and since spread to 114,334 people worldwide, with 624 cases and 22 deaths reported in the US as of 9 March. (Also see "Coronavirus Drives TCM Sales In China, Clouds Global Consumer Health Outlook" - HBW Insight, 20 Feb, 2020.)

Yet, several companies marketing silver-containing supplements claimed their products are "home treatments" or can kill the virus and remove it from the body completely.

The FDA's warning about Bakker's program that airs on the PTL Network for claims made for prevention and treatment immunity supplement Silver Solution was sent the same day the New York state attorney general announced a "cease and desist" order against him and his show. (Also see "Like Other Outbreaks, Coronavirus Symptoms Include False Health Claims, Price-Gouging" - HBW Insight, 6 Mar, 2020.)

The Center for Science in the Public Interest had asked federal and state authorities to investigate claims for Bakker's "silly Silver Solution."

"Quacks who market dietary supplements love nothing more than a crisis. For someone like Jim Bakker, a crisis is just an opportunity to market worthless pills and potions as miraculous cures," said CSPI president Peter Lurie.

N-ergetics' Colloidal Silver product, which the Atoka, OK, firm offers at \$29.59 for 4 ounces, were posted on its website with advertising claims stating it has been used for over a century as a natural home remedy for



UK FIRM QUINESSENCE AROMATHERAPY POSTED ON ITS WEBSITE CLAIMS INCLUDING "ESSENTIAL OILS TO PROTECT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS."

coronaviruses and states it is the only known treatment.



HERBAL AMY BRANDED A PACKAGE OF TINCTURES AND TEA IT OFFERS AS ITS “CORONAVIRUS PROTOCOL.”

“Even though there are no vaccines available to combat these coronaviruses, there is a home remedy of Colloidal Silver 100ppm that has worked effectively on coronaviruses successfully for the last 123 years,” the firm said.

It also highlighted the threat of coronavirus, noting that deaths from the regular flu and pneumonia “pale in comparison to the coronavirus flu. It is very contagious and quick to kill. Colloidal Silver kills all viruses.”

Colloidal Vitality promoted its Pure Vital Silver product with claims on its Facebook page that China is using ionic silver in its fight against the spread of the virus.

The Melbourne, FL, firm also described on the site how its Structured Silver Advanced Formula helps fight pathogens. “The structured silver circulating in your blood attaches to bacteria, yeast and viruses rendering them ineffective and boosting your immune system,” the site – now temporarily unavailable – noted. Also, the site claimed the product “allows a silver particle-cluster of silver to kill multiple bacteria, viruses and yeast//candida pathogens throughout the body until it is safely excreted.”

Colloidal Vitality offers Structured Silver Advanced formula at \$24.99 for 16 ounces.

Herbal Extract Brands Push Buhner’s ‘Protocol’

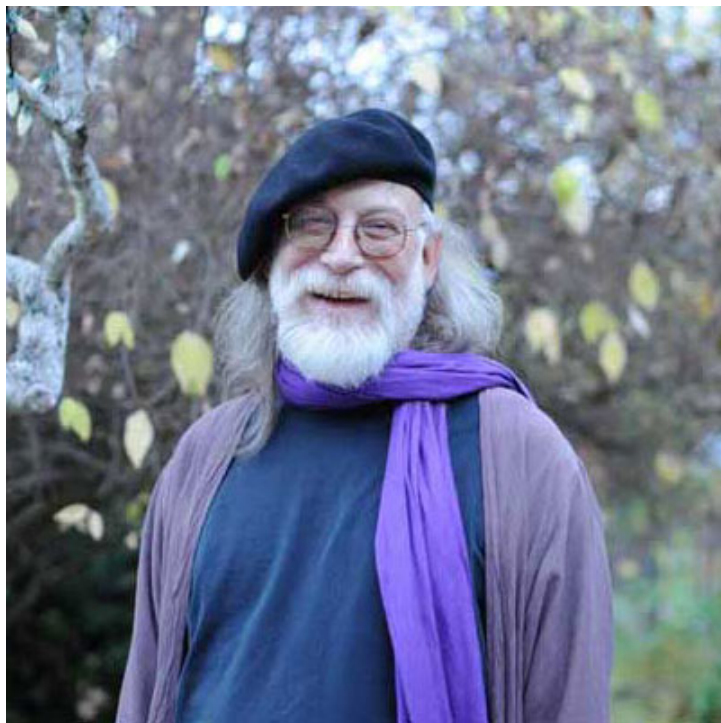
Both Vivify Holistic and Herbal Amy link their claims to plant researcher and natural healing herbalist Stephen Buhner, an “earth poet” who has published 15 books on nature, indigenous cultures and the environment.

Vivify even set up a website using “coronavirusdefense” in the address to promote Buhner’s four-part protocol linking it to the company’s own products, to treat Covid-19.

The Sarnia, ON, company’s site stated, “Regarding the Wuhan Coronavirus: Stephen Buhner... has done extensive research on coronaviruses ... he has treated them very successfully using his protocols.” The site also stated “with active infection” of coronavirus, “consumers should take “very strong boneset tea, to 6x a day.”

Vivify’s four-part protocol comprises three 100-mL herbal extract bottles plus a loose leaf tea for \$130.

The company no longer mentions coronavirus anywhere on its site, but continues to discuss Buhner and his herbalist work and protocol under



HERBAL AMY AND VIVIFY HOLISTIC NOTED HERBALIST STEPHEN BUHNER DEVELOPED THEIR CORONAVIRUS PRODUCTS.

essential oil products with treatment claims that discuss how the products work to battle Covid-19.

Quinessence, of Leicestershire, England, posted on its website claims including “Essential Oils To Protect Against Coronavirus.” GuruNanda offered a discount along with claims, saying “since the flu is spreading so quickly, we want to give 50% off for the essential oils ... simply type ‘Corona’.”

FDA Lists Bogus Covid-19 Claims

FDA also reminded Quinessence and Vivify that products offered for importation into the US that appear to be misbranded or unapproved new drugs are subject to detention and refusal of admission. The agency said it may advise regulatory officials in the firm’s countries that it considers their products unapproved and misbranded, the agencies said.

While the warnings are not common for the FDA because the firms’ violative claims are about an emerging health crisis, for the FTC the bogus advertising is more of the type it commonly warns firms about concerning consumer health products.

The claims, the FTC advises the coronavirus product marketers much as it says to other supplement firms it targets due to egregiously false and misleading claims, should be with well-controlled human clinical studies.

“To make or exaggerate such claims, whether directly or indirectly, through the use of a product name, website name, metatags or other means, without rigorous scientific evidence sufficient to substantiate the claims, violates the FTC Act,” the agency says.

Violations of the FTC Act may result in legal action seeking a federal district court injunction and an order that may require a company to pay consumer redress,

If companies cannot respond in the timeframe requested in the letter, they are to send an email explaining why they cannot meet the deadline and when they are able to respond.

the website header, “The Buhner Protocol: Using Herbs to Stay Healthy.”

Herbal Amy not only discussed Buhner and his protocol as a “Coronavirus treatment” on its website, but also went further by branding the package of four tinctures and one tea it offers as its “Coronavirus Protocol.”

“This is a rather extensive protocol because the particular corona virus that is now spreading worldwide is exceptionally potent in its impacts,” the Namp, ID, firm says. It also stated that Buhner “has used this with other coronavirus infections, including SARS, it works well.”

Herbal Amy has removed Buhner’s protocol description from its website, where it continues to sell the four products together with the same product names for \$155.

The remaining two firms that received warning letters – GuruNanda, of Buena Park, CA, and UK company Quinessence Aromatherapy – marketed

FDA says each firm will be placed on a list on its website of companies that have received warning letters. “Once you have taken corrective actions and such actions have been confirmed by the FDA, the published list will be updated to indicate that your firm has taken appropriate corrective action,” the agency adds.

Previously, FTC warned consumers against Covid-19 cure scams and FDA committed to using “every authority at our disposal” to protect consumers from bad actors looking to capitalize off the crisis, including warning letters, seizures or injunctions. (Also see "Coronavirus Disruption Likely In Supply Chain, Stockpiling Spikes Consumer Health Sales" - HBW Insight, 6 Mar, 2020.)

The agencies will continue monitoring social media and the online marketplace to make sure the warned companies don't market the same products under different names; the FTC set up a blog for consumers on coronavirus.