

Refresh Your Cough & Cold Section

For virtually all stores, cough, cold & allergy is the No. 1 selling category. Here are inventory tips to keep it your top-selling department and generate companion sales in the process.

How Big Should Your Department Be?

A 12-foot cough & cold section is big enough for most large stores. An apothecary-size store can utilize a customized 4-foot planogram, but would need a companion power wing or free-standing display of throat lozenges, or better yet, a combination end-cap displaying throat lozenges, facial tissues, medicine spoons, thermometers, vaporizers, and humidifiers. I recommend an 8-foot planogram of cough, cold & allergy for most stores, along with a 4-foot section of facial tissues, medicine spoons, thermometers, vaporizers, and humidifiers.

Private label continues to make inroads in the cough, cold & allergy category, more so in the non-tasting segment (think capsules, tablets, and caplets as opposed to liquids).

(Note: A power wing is an add-on display rack that stands 48 inches tall and 16 inches wide. The wing is typically attached to the side of an end-cap; though you can purchase wire baskets for the wings, the wing is commonly used to display pegged items. If you have aisles that are at least 5 feet wide, then you should have one power wing per end-cap.)

Cough, cold & allergy is typically found adjacent to or in line with the pain relief department. Vitamins and supplements are also a good neighbor for this major department.



Watch Your Pricing

Contrary to popular belief, a number of items in the cough, cold & allergy category are indeed price-sensitive. You can thank the massive amount of marketing that is done by some of the major brand manufacturers for this phenomenon. Adding to the digital media hype is the constant barrage of sales fliers and in-store and direct mail promotions of brand and even private label best-selling cough & cold products. Keep a close eye on your retail for the following brands: Delsym, Robitussin, Mucinex, Dayquil, Nyquil, Allegra, Claritin, Benadryl, and their compare-to private labels. Remember, you do not have to be the best price in town, but being the most expensive in town is never good.

Merchandising Tips

- Choose and sign the “pharmacist recommended” products for each subcategory: adult allergy, flu, sinus, and sore throat; those dealing with high blood pressure; sugar-free; dye-free, children’s cough & cold; and children’s allergy.
- Cough, cold & allergy planograms typically do not include facial tissues, thermometers, or medicine spoons. Make sure these items are easy to find for that companion sale.
- During flu season, place a small rack of toothbrushes in the cough & cold section with a sign: “Throw those germs away!”
- Identify all sugar-free items in the section and be sure to clearly mark or sign them.
- Consider keeping the bags of lozenges in the cough & cold section and placing the single packs and smaller boxes at a check-out area.
- Your lozenge selection should offer sugar-free, natural, and immune booster options. This is one time that line extensions can be an advantage. Store owners with an older customer clientele should look into more recognizable brands such as front-runner Halls along with Luden’s, Smith Brothers, Pine Brothers, and Fisherman’s Friend. Burt’s Bees lozenges are showing growth in sales at stores I have visited.
- Some stores have reported increased sales of local honey when displayed on an end-cap and/or in the allergy section.
- In early August, purchase and maintain enough facial tissues, throat lozenges, and best-selling relief items to fill each of the shelf spaces and/or pegs. The cold season is a long one – be ready for it.



-- Gabe Trahan, NCPA Senior Director of Store Operations and Marketing