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Ephedra apricot kernel gypsum & licorice decoction (Ma Xing Gan Shi Tang) and honeysuckle & forsythia powder (Yin Qiao San) are among the repertoire of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) formulas for the treatment of the common cold

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Aim of the study: A pharmaco-epidemiological study of the use of TCM prescriptions for the common cold helps identify the predominant TCM ingredients and ingredient pairs in the prescription. The identification also determines the associated TCM syndromes. Association with weather conditions is useful for the prediction of seasonal use of particular TCM common cold formulas.

Materials and Methods: Over four million TCM prescriptions, made throughout a year, for the common cold and cough were obtained from the National Health Insurance Reimbursement Database (Taiwan). Ingredient (i.e. single herb or multi-herb formula) combinations in the prescriptions were enumerated to identify the predominant combinations. Monthly densities of combinations per prescription were correlated with climate data to identify the climate factors and seasons that predict the formula use.

Results: Ingredient combinations were presented in the form of networks. The resulting co-ingredient network of the common cold revealed two hubs: Ma Xing Gan Shi Tang and Yin Qiao San. Correlation studies indicated that the use of Ma Xing Gan Shi Tang was associated with low temperature and low humidity and that Yin Qiao San use was associated with high temperature and rainy days.

Conclusion: Prescription of Ma Xing Gan Shi Tang for the common cold prevailed in Taiwan throughout the year and especially between winter and early spring. On the other hand, Yin Qiao San use increased in warm and rainy seasons in Taiwan, when the acute febrile illness spread.

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