



Antiviral Drug Facts

For More Information:

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You can also visit the following Web sites for the latest information on antivirals:

CDC&P:

www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/antiviral.htm

www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/antiviral/

World Health Organization (WHO):

www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/antivirals2005_11_3/en/

To obtain a copy of this document in an alternate format, call (971) 673-1222
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Introduction

- Vaccination is the best way to prevent the influenza and its complications. Antiviral medications are no substitute for vaccination, but they may help prevent and treat influenza in some circumstances.
- Antivirals are most often used to control flu outbreaks in nursing homes, hospital wards, or other places where people at high risk for complications from flu are in close contact with each other. These drugs also have been used on cruise ships or similar settings to control outbreaks of the flu.
- Four antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, zanamivir and oseltamivir) are approved for preventing or treating the flu.
- When used for prevention, they are about 70% to 90% effective for preventing illness in healthy adults.
- If taken within two days of getting sick, antivirals can reduce the symptoms of the flu and shorten the time people are sick by one or two days. They also can make those who are ill less contagious to others.

Use of Antivirals

- Both flu vaccine and antivirals may be used in the event of an outbreak. For example, during an outbreak in a nursing home, residents and staff are vaccinated—and then given antivirals to prevent flu until the vaccine takes effect (about 2 weeks).
- When considering antivirals, it's important to remember that most healthy people recover from the flu without complications.

Who Should Get Antiviral Drugs?

- **For Treatment:** If you get sick with flu-like symptoms this season, your doctor first may give you a test to find out whether you have influenza. Symptoms include fever (usually high), headache, tiredness, a sore throat and dry cough, nasal congestion and body aches. Your doctor also will consider a number of things before making a treatment decision, such as your risk of complications from flu.
- **For Prevention:** In the event of a flu outbreak in a home, institution, or community, your doctor may recommend antivirals as a preventive measure, especially if you are at high risk for complications from the flu. Also, if you are in close contact with someone who is considered at high risk for complications from flu, you may be given antiviral drugs to prevent passing flu to the high-risk person.

Misuse of Antivirals

- Recent outbreaks of bird flu in Asia, and predictions of a potential future pandemic have prompted some individuals to seek prescriptions of certain brands of antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu® (oseltamivir) and Relenza® (zanamivir) “just in case,” however, this is discouraged.
- People who stockpile antivirals for future use could make these drugs less available for those who need them now.
- Existing supplies of antiviral medications need to be reserved for those who are at the most risk of complications from annual seasonal influenza. These include:
 - People 65 years of age and older
 - Children 6-23 months of age*
 - People of any age with chronic medical conditions (for example, heart or lung disease, diabetes)
 - Pregnant women

(*Please note: Antivirals are not approved for use in children less than 1 year of age.)

- Antivirals are prescription medications with potentially serious side effects and must be taken according to your doctor’s instructions to be effective.
- Indiscriminate and inappropriate use of antivirals may promote the growth and spread of drug-resistant influenza viruses, rendering the currently available drugs ineffective.
- Antiviral drugs are effective only against influenza viruses. They will not help reduce symptoms associated with the common cold or many other flu-like illnesses caused by viruses that circulate in the winter.
- All of the available antiviral drugs differ regarding who can take them, how they are given, appropriate dose based on age or medical conditions, and side effects. Your doctor will help decide whether you should get antivirals and which one is right for you.

Government Stockpiling of Antiviral Medications

- The United States has a limited supply of influenza antiviral medications in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) for emergency situations. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will continue to procure additional supplies of antiviral medications. Some of this supply will be held in reserve in the event of an influenza pandemic.
- Some experts believe that, should a pandemic strain emerge, antivirals might help to slow its spread and buy time to produce vaccines against the new virus.