



Influenza

Antiviral Drugs: General Public

Antiviral medications are an important second line of defense in the prevention and treatment of influenza.

- Influenza antiviral drugs can be used to treat influenza if given within 48 hours of symptom onset.
- These medications are also used to prevent influenza in people who have been exposed to the virus.
- Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza because vaccination can be given well before influenza virus exposures occur, and it provides safe and effective immunity throughout the influenza season.
- Antiviral medications are 70% to 90% effective in preventing influenza.

Treatment with Antiviral Medications

Antiviral drugs are used to prevent and to treat viral illnesses, like influenza. They often are used to control influenza outbreaks in long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes or in people who are at risk for serious complications due to influenza.

- Influenza antiviral medications should be started as soon as possible after symptom onset. These medications have not been shown to be effective if administered more than 48 hours after onset of symptoms.

Approved Antiviral Medications

Three FDA-approved influenza antiviral medications are recommended for use in the United States: oseltamivir (generic and Tamiflu®), zanamivir (Relenza®), and peramivir (Rapivab®).

- Oseltamivir (brand name Tamiflu®) is approved to treat influenza A and B virus infection in people 14 days and older and to prevent influenza A and B virus infection in people 3 months and older.
- Zanamivir (brand name Relenza®) is approved to treat influenza A and B virus infection in people 7 years and older and to prevent influenza A and B virus infection in people 5 years and older.
- Peramivir (brand name Rapivab®) is approved to treat influenza A and B virus infection in people 2 years and older.

There is a second class of influenza antiviral medications known as adamantanes (amantadine and rimantadine) that are licensed in the U.S. for the treatment and prevention of influenza. However, because a high proportion of circulating influenza viruses in the U.S. in recent years have been resistant to the adamantanes, CDC recommends that neither be used for the treatment or prevention of influenza in the United States.

Where can I get antiviral medication?

Antiviral medications are available by prescription only through your health care provider.

What are the possible side effects of antiviral medication?

There are different side effects for each of the antiviral drugs. If your health care provider and/or pharmacist have given you antiviral drugs, ask about how to take them and any possible side effects.

Who will be helped most from antiviral drugs?

- People 65 years of age and older
- Children 12 months of age and older
- Immunocompromised individuals (people with HIV or those receiving immunosuppressive medications like chemotherapy)
- People with chronic medical conditions (e.g., heart or lung disease, diabetes)
- Prevention for people who were vaccinated less than two weeks ago
- Prevention for unvaccinated people caring for those at high risk (e.g., employees of hospitals, clinics, nursing homes)
- Prevention for people who cannot receive influenza vaccine due to an egg allergy or other contradiction
- Treatment of persons with influenza who live with or care for people at high risk
- Treatment of high risk persons with influenza

What can you do to protect yourself and others from influenza?

- Get your influenza (flu) vaccination
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing with disposables tissue or cough into your upper arm
- Wash your hands often using soap for at least 15-20 seconds, especially after coughing or touching drainage from your nose, or after shaking hands with a lot of people
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers
- Disinfect surfaces regularly
- Stay home from work or school when sick
- Practice healthy behaviors such as eating right and exercising regularly

Contact information:

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