



Influenza

www.flu.oregon.gov

Use of Antiviral Medicines

Introduction

- Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza and its complications. Antiviral medications are no substitute for vaccination, but they may help prevent and treat influenza in some circumstances.
- Antivirals can be 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.
- When used for prevention of seasonal flu, 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 two weeks).
- When considering antivirals, it's important to remember that most healthy people recover from the flu without complications.

Who should get antiviral drugs?

- Antivirals are generally used to treat flu, and are only used for prevention in special cases.

- 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.
- 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. People at increased risk include those who are age 65 and older, those with chronic medical conditions, women who are pregnant, and children under the age of five.
- 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.



CDC recommendations for the use of antiviral drugs

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with H1N1 influenza viruses in some instances.
 - Oseltamivir is approved to both treat and prevent infection in people 1 year of age and older.
 - Zanamivir is approved to treat influenza in people 7 years and older, and to prevent influenza in people 5 years and older.



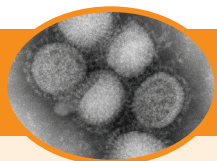
- The CDC recommends that these drugs be used for treatment and/or prevention of influenza in patients with a high risk for influenza-related complications such as:



- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5 years old
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Children and adolescents (younger than 18) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye Syndrome after flu infection
- Adults and children who have asthma
- Adults and children who have chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, liver disease, neuromuscular or nervous system disorders
- Persons who have metabolic disorders such as diabetes
- Adults and children who have decreased immunity, including that caused by medication or by HIV
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities.

Misuse of antivirals

- Last year's outbreak of pandemic H1N1 flu around the world prompted some individuals to seek prescriptions of antiviral medicines, "just in case." However, this is discouraged.
- Antivirals are prescription medications with potentially serious side effects and must be taken according to your doctor's instructions to be effective. The most common side effects of these drugs are nausea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, stuffy nose, cough and fatigue.
- 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.
- 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.



For more information

Oregon Public Health Division
www.flu.oregon.gov

Oregon Public Health Hotline
1-800-978-3040

Oregon county health departments
www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/lhd/lhd.shtml

Federal pandemic H1N1 flu information
www.flu.gov

World Health Organization:
www.who.int

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