



Antiviral Drugs for Influenza Prevention and Treatment

Antiviral drugs are not a substitute for influenza (flu) vaccination. However, prescription antiviral medications play an important role in preventing and controlling the spread of influenza. These medications are a critical component of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "Take 3" Actions to Fight the Flu. Take 3 urges everyone age 6 months and older to get vaccinated, follow good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, and to take antiviral medications if they are prescribed.¹

Influenza antiviral drugs are available to treat and prevent influenza:

- **For Treatment:** Antiviral drugs can reduce influenza symptoms, shorten the duration of illness, and prevent serious complications, like pneumonia, if taken within 48 hours of symptom onset.^{1,2}
- **For Prevention:** Antiviral drugs may also be prescribed to help prevent influenza in individuals who have been exposed to the virus. Antiviral drugs are about 70 to 90 percent effective when used as directed for prevention.³

For the 2014-15 flu season, CDC recommends use of either oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) for treatment and prevention of influenza.² Oseltamivir and zanamivir are dosed and administered differently, and are recommended for patients based on age and risk factors. A healthcare professional is best equipped to make an appropriate flu diagnosis and determine if antiviral treatment is recommended. More information about antiviral treatments is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/antivirals>.

Time Is of the Essence

With antiviral therapy, timing is critical. A healthcare professional should be contacted at the first sign of influenza symptoms such as sudden onset of fever, aches, chills, and tiredness (*for more information, see the fact sheet "Understanding Influenza"*). Antiviral drugs should be started within 48 hours of symptom onset or exposure to the virus.² In the event of an influenza outbreak in a home, institution, or community, healthcare professionals may choose to prescribe antiviral drugs as a preventive measure, especially for those at high risk for complications from influenza.³

References:

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Says "Take 3" Steps To Fight The Flu. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm>. Accessed August 21, 2014.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What You Should Know About Flu Antiviral Drugs. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/antivirals/whatyoushould.htm>. Accessed August 21, 2014.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Use of Antivirals. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/antiviral-use-influenza.htm>. Accessed August 21, 2014.