

Antiviral Prescription Drugs for the Treatment of Flu

Since the flu is caused by a virus that cannot be treated with antibiotics, for most who have it, there is no need for treatment beyond basic self-care and symptom relief. However, in some cases, the use of antiviral medication may be indicated.

There are two FDA-approved antiviral medications to treat influenza (Tamiflu and Relenza) approved for use in the United States. Health Services carries Tamiflu. Clinical trials and observational data show that early antiviral treatment can shorten the duration of fever and illness symptoms, and may reduce the risk of complications from influenza (e.g., pneumonia, respiratory failure), and death, and shorten the duration of hospitalization. Clinical benefit is greatest when antiviral treatment is administered early, especially within 48 hours of influenza illness onset.

Antiviral treatment is recommended as early as possible for any patient with confirmed or suspected influenza who:

- is hospitalized;
- has severe, complicated, or progressive illness; or
- is at higher risk for influenza complications.
 - children aged <2 years;
 - adults aged ≥ 65 years;
 - persons with specific health conditions: chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension alone), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus), or neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions (including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy [seizure disorders], stroke, intellectual disability [mental retardation], moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury);
 - persons with immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or by HIV infection;
 - women who are pregnant or postpartum (within 2 weeks after delivery);
 - persons aged <19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy;
 - American Indians/Alaska Natives;
 - persons who are morbidly obese (i.e., body-mass index ≥ 40); and
 - residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities.