

H1N1 Flu and Antiviral Drugs

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Hello. I'm Dr. Tony Fiore with CDC's Influenza Division. I'm here to speak with you today about antiviral drugs that can be used to treat or prevent human infections with a new type of H1N1 flu virus, which has also been called swine flu. Since March 2009, this new virus has caused human illness in the United States and other countries. If you get sick with this flu, it's important that you know about antiviral drugs that can make your illness milder, make you feel better faster, and potentially prevent serious influenza complications.

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines, such as pills, liquid, or an inhaler that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. They can also be used to prevent flu when they're given to a person who is not ill. Use of antiviral drugs should be reserved, however, for certain situations, such as when a person at higher risk for influenza complications is exposed to the virus. This includes persons 65 or older, infants and young children, and persons with chronic medical conditions. When used for prevention, the number of days antiviral drugs should be used will vary, depending on a person's particular situation.

If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started within two days of symptoms, but treatment should still be considered after two days of symptom onset, particularly for hospitalized patients or people at higher risk for flu-related complications.

These medications must be prescribed by a health care professional. Flu antiviral drugs only work against flu viruses; they won't help treat or prevent symptoms caused by infection from other viruses that can cause symptoms similar to the flu.

The new H1N1 flu viruses that have infected people in the United States and Mexico are sensitive to oseltamivir and zanamivir. CDC recommends that clinicians consider using these drugs to prevent or treat infection with the new H1N1 flu viruses, focusing on patients at higher risk for influenza complications or those who are hospitalized. One or both of these drugs should be available at pharmacies or hospitals in your area, and both drugs are in the recently released Federal stockpile.

In addition to antiviral medications, it's important to remember that there are basic things that people can do every day to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses, like flu viruses.

First, wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Also remember to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue in the trash afterwards.

Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If you get sick with flu, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth because germs can spread that way.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, that's 1-800-232-4636.

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