

Information about Flu and Instructions for Use of Tamiflu

What is Flu?

Influenza (also called "the flu") is a viral infection in the nose, throat and lungs. About 10% to 20% of Americans get the flu each year. Some people get very sick. Each year, about 130,000 people go to a hospital with the flu, and 20,000 people die because of the flu and complications.

The flu may cause fever, cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches and tiredness. Some people describe the flu as being like the worst cold of their life. Most people feel better after 1 or 2 weeks. But for some people, the flu leads to serious, even life-threatening, diseases, such as pneumonia. Influenza vaccine (the flu shot) is recommended for people who are more likely to get really sick to protect them from the flu.

How do you prevent flu?

The best way to avoid getting the flu is to get the influenza vaccine each fall, before the flu season. The vaccine is available by shot or by nasal spray. The vaccines work by exposing your immune system to the flu virus. Your body will build up antibodies to the virus to protect you from getting the flu. The flu shot contains dead viruses. The nasal-spray vaccine contains live but weakened viruses. You cannot get the flu from the flu shot or the nasal-spray vaccine.

Some people who get the vaccine will still get the flu, but they will usually get a milder case than people who aren't vaccinated. The vaccine is especially recommended for people who are more likely to get really sick from flu-related complications.

What are antiviral flu drugs?

Antiviral flu drugs are prescription medicines that can be used to help prevent and/or treat the flu. There are four antiviral flu drugs: amantadine (one brand name: Symmetrel), oseltamivir (brand name: **Tamiflu**), rimantadine (brand name: Flumadine) and zanamavir (brand name: Relenza). All 4 of these antiviral drugs have been approved to treat the flu. If you take one of these drugs within 2 days of getting sick, it can lessen your symptoms, decrease the amount of time you are sick and make you less contagious to other people. However, most healthy people who have the flu get better without using an antiviral flu drug. Your doctor will decide whether one of these medicines is right for you.

Three of the antiviral flu drugs have also been approved to prevent the flu. These drugs are not a substitute for the influenza vaccine. They are most often used for flu prevention in institutions where people at high risk for flu complications are in close contact with each other, such as nursing homes or hospitals. For example, during a flu outbreak in a nursing home, residents and staff might be given the flu vaccine and an antiviral drug to prevent the flu until the vaccine takes effect.

Instructions for use of Tamiflu

Tamiflu is an anti-viral medication used to treat or prevent the flu. Do not start the medication until you speak to your doctor. There are 2 ways it can be taken.

- 1) If you become sick with the flu with high fever, muscle aches, cough and other respiratory symptoms, you take one tablet twice a day for 5 days. The Tamiflu should be taken within 24 – 36 hours at the onset of symptoms. You should speak to your doctor before starting the medication. Tamiflu has been shown to reduce the duration of flu symptoms by 1 – 2 days and decreases the severity by 40%. It can be used even if you have had the flu vaccine.
- 2) If you are exposed to a person who is known to have flu, begin to take one tablet daily until you have been 7 days away from the ill person. In the event of a flu epidemic, you take one tablet daily until the risk has abated.