



**PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET**

**Influenza (Flu) Drugs**

**What are influenza drugs?**

Influenza (“flu”) is an illness caused by a virus. The drugs that treat and/or prevent the flu and other diseases caused by viruses are called antivirals. There are four antiviral drugs that are available to control and prevent the flu: amantadine, rimantadine, zanamivir and oseltamivir.

**Do I still need to get a flu shot?**

Antiviral drugs are not a substitute for flu vaccine. They are best used along with flu vaccine to help control and prevent the flu.

**Are these drugs effective against all types of flu viruses?**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved amantadine and rimantadine to treat and prevent illness from influenza type A. These two drugs fight influenza A viruses, but not influenza B viruses. Zanamivir (trade name: Relenza®) and oseltamivir (trade name: Tamiflu®) are approved by the FDA to treat and prevent illness from influenza A and B viruses.

Studies have shown that all four drugs reduce flu symptoms if taken within 48 hours of symptom onset. If someone in your family is diagnosed with the flu, taking one of these drugs may reduce your chances of getting sick.

**What are the side effects of flu drugs?**

Amantadine and rimantadine have side effects that include insomnia, anxiety, nausea and loss of appetite. In some cases, serious side effects such as seizures have been reported. In some people, zanamivir can cause wheezing or serious breathing problems that need prompt treatment. Other common side effects with zanamivir include headache and diarrhea. With oseltamivir, the most common side effects are nausea and vomiting.

**Who should take flu drugs?**

The FDA approved amantadine, rimantadine and oseltamivir to treat and prevent influenza in adults and children 1 year old or older. Zanamivir is approved by the FDA to treat and prevent influenza in adults and children 5 years old and older.

**Who should not take flu drugs?**

People allergic to these drugs or their ingredients should not take them. Zanamivir is not recommended for people with chronic breathing diseases such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Oseltamivir dosage may need to be adjusted for people with kidney disease. None of these drugs is recommended for use during pregnancy or nursing. For complete safety

information about these drugs, talk with your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

**Where can I get flu drugs?**

Antiviral drugs are available by prescription only and are not available over-the-counter.

**How do I take flu drugs?**

Amantaine and rimantadine are available in pill form and are taken by mouth. Oseltamivir is available as a pill for adults or in liquid form for children who cannot swallow pills. Zanamivir is an orally inhaled powder.

**Which flu drug should I take?**

Your healthcare provider will decide which flu drug to prescribe. Which drug you take will depend on the type of flu virus that is currently causing illness in your area and your health history.

**For More Information**

Talk to your healthcare provider.

Visit the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services website at [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)