AUSTIN REGIONAL CLINIC

Tamiflu, Xofluza, Relenza

Antiviral Flu Medication

Antiviral medications are often requested to shorten the duration and severity of symptoms caused by the flu virus. There are risks and side effects you should be aware of before taking antiviral medications.

WHAT IS TAMIFLU AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Tamiflu, Xofluza, and Relenza are medications that treat the viruses that cause the flu. If taken within 48 hours of getting the flu, some studies show it may reduce symptoms by about one day. You will still have the flu – there is no cure for the flu.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Common side effects associated with Tamiflu are nausea and vomiting. Nausea and vomiting usually happen within the first 2 days of treatment. Side effects for the other antiviral medications include diarrhea and allergic reactions such as skin rashes. Relenza is not recommended in those with asthma or chronic lung disease.

WHAT IS THE RISK?

The flu virus could become resistant to the medication, making the drug ineffective or less effective when needed most, particularly, for high-risk individuals such as babies and young children (under 2 years old), seniors, and people with compromised immune systems and chronic health conditions.

Remember, antiviral medications are only effective within the first 48 hours of symptoms. If you do not have a high-risk of complications from influenza, a flu medication will do little to change your symptoms.

The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends antivirals be considered for those who have household contacts who are less than 6 months old or whose household members have a high risk condition for influenza.

WHO SHOULD USE TAMIFLU OR ANOTHER MEDICATION AGAINST INFLUENZA

Tamiflu should be targeted for individuals with severe disease or higher risk of complications from influenza, including:

- Pregnant and postpartum patients
- Residents of nursing homes or chronic care facilities
- Individuals with chronic pulmonary disease, including asthma
- Individuals with cardiovascular disease , excluding hypertension
- Individuals with an active malignancy
- Individuals with chronic kidney or liver disease
- Individuals with diabetes
- Individuals with sickle cell disease/hemoglobinopathies
- Individuals with immunosuppression – including HIV and immunosuppressive therapy
- Individuals with neurologic disease that affects handling of respiratory secretions
- Individuals with neurologic or metabolic disease that affects handling of respiratory secretions
- Individuals who are of American Indian or Native Alaskan descent
- Individuals who are extremely obese (BMI >40 in adults or >95th% in children)
- Adults 65 and older
- Individuals who have close contact with an infant less than 6 months old
- Children under 2 years old
- Children on chronic aspirin

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TREAT THE FLU?

Most healthy individuals will get through flu with rest, fluids, and supportive measures to treat symptoms.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT THE FLU?

The best protection is the flu shot. Getting a flu shot not only prevents you from getting the flu, it will also reduce the severity of the flu in the rare chance you do get sick. Other simple preventative measures include:

- Wash your hands often
- Cover your nose when you cough or sneeze with your elbow (or something other than your hands)
- Avoid people who appear sick
- Stay home if sick