

# Treating Pandemic Flu: Vaccines and Antiviral Drugs

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This fact sheet provides information on the influenza vaccine and antiviral drugs.

## Pandemic Flu Prevention

Influenza vaccine is the primary mean to prevent illness from regular seasonal flu. It is administered by injection and provides immunity (it helps prevent people from getting the disease) by producing antibodies against the flu virus.

A pandemic flu vaccine cannot, however, be manufactured until the pandemic influenza virus has been identified, and it may take between four to six months for the vaccine to be developed. As a result, during the early stages of a pandemic, antiviral drugs may be the only medicine available to treat the flu.

## What Are Antiviral Drugs?

Antiviral drugs are medications that can be used during the flu season for the prevention and early treatment of the flu. They work by reducing the ability of the virus to reproduce. If taken shortly after getting sick (i.e., within 48 hours), they can reduce flu symptoms, shorten the length of the illness, and reduce serious complications. It is assumed that antiviral drugs will be effective in a pandemic.

Antiviral drugs can only be obtained by prescription. They must be taken within 48 hours of the start of symptoms to be most effective.

## Are There Supplies Of Antiviral Drugs?

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that antiviral drugs be stockpiled to treat 25 per cent of the population. The Ontario government is currently stockpiling enough antivirals to treat 25 per cent of Ontarians.

Should a pandemic emerge before the 25 per cent level is reached, the antiviral drugs will be given to those who are most likely to benefit and to those who perform essential services.

## For More Information

Visit our website at  
[www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic)

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