

What are influenza antiviral medications?

Influenza antiviral medication (drug) reduces an influenza virus' ability to reproduce in the body. They are not a cure for influenza. When used appropriately, they can shorten the duration and lessen the severity of illness. They may also be used to prevent illness in people who are exposed to influenza.

How are antiviral medications used for influenza?

For Treatment: To be most effective, antivirals must be started within 48 hours of the start of symptoms.

For Prevention: During pandemic, health care workers, first responders, and others may be considered for prevention depending on their level of exposure to influenza, job duties, availability and prioritization of antivirals.

What are the types of antiviral medications available?

There are two categories of antivirals: amantadines and neuraminidase inhibitors. Because a pandemic strain of influenza may be resistant to an amantadine, neuraminidase inhibitors are currently recommended for treatment and prevention. These are:

- Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) is licensed for the prevention and treatment of persons greater than 1 year of age.
- Zanamivir (Relenza®) is licensed for the treatment of persons older than 7 years, prevention or treatment of persons aged greater than 5 years.

Why is the State of Iowa purchasing and storing antiviral medications for pandemic influenza?

The State of Iowa, in cooperation with the federal government, has decided to purchase, store and manage antiviral medications. Purchasing and storing these medications now may prevent or reduce the possibility of shortages of the medications during a pandemic. According to federal guidelines, these medications may only be used for treatment during pandemic influenza.

How much antiviral medication is being purchased by the state?

Iowa and the federal government are purchasing and storing enough antiviral medications to treat about 25 percent of Iowans with one course of medication. A course is the number of doses needed per person for the treatment of influenza. Iowa will store Tamiflu® and Relenza®.

What will happen if there is a shortage of antiviral medications during a pandemic?

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) will decide which groups of people need the medications the most, in other words, prioritize the use of antiviral medications. IDPH will first look to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for guidelines on antiviral prioritization. Once those guidelines are established, IDPH may adjust them to the circumstances in Iowa.

In general, prioritization of antivirals will depend on a number of factors, most of which will be unknown until the pandemic arrives. These factors include antiviral drug availability, population-based need (i.e. who is getting sick and dying), and whether the pandemic influenza strain is resistant to the available antiviral medications.

Will first responders be among the priority groups for receiving antiviral medication?

First responders will be considered when priority groups are determined.

How will antiviral medication be distributed during a pandemic?

Methods of distribution will depend on the situation. Local public health agencies and county emergency management will likely be involved with any distribution of antiviral medication.