

Use of Antivirals for Treatment and Prevention of Influenza

Flu season tips for York Region health care providers as of November 11, 2019

As flu season rapidly approaches, consider the following strategies for treating and preventing the spread of influenza in our community. Annual influenza vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of influenza. Antiviral medications can also be used to reduce the duration of influenza symptoms and help treat and prevent influenza outbreaks in institutional settings.

Antiviral drugs currently used in Canada for the treatment and prevention of seasonal influenza are oseltamivir (Tamiflu®), which is administered orally, and zanamavir (Relenza®), which is inhaled.

Influenza antiviral medications are recommended for:

Treatment:

- in both inpatient and outpatient settings among those at high risk of complications from influenza, such as adults 65 years of age and over, pregnant women and women up to four weeks post-partum, Indigenous people and those with underlying medical conditions
- of moderate, progressive, severe or complicated influenza, such as individuals who are hospitalized with influenza-like illness

Prevention:

- antiviral prophylaxis during influenza outbreaks in institutional settings, such as long-term care homes, retirement homes and hospitals.

Antivirals to treat influenza

When influenza is circulating, laboratory confirmation is not needed before initiating antiviral treatment, in order to avoid delays in starting treatment. Consult the weekly flu report issued by York Region Public Health (YRPH) once flu season begins to assess influenza activity levels. You can access our weekly flu reports and monthly disease reports by visiting york.ca/healthprofessionals and select **Health Statistics and Reports**.

Antiviral treatment is recommended, regardless of time from symptom onset, in individuals with moderate, progressive, severe or complicated influenza-like illness, such as individuals who are hospitalized. Although treatment is generally more beneficial if given early, it can still be considered in those at high risk for influenza complications if more than 48 hours has passed from symptom onset.

Antiviral medications are recommended if you can answer “yes” to **all** of the following questions:

- Is influenza circulating in your community?
 - Does your patient have symptoms compatible with influenza?
 - Is your patient at high risk for the complications of influenza?
- OR
- Does your patient have moderate, progressive, severe or complicated influenza?

In addition, if **patients without risk factors for complications** and without serious illness present within 48 hours of symptom onset, antiviral treatment can be used as follows:

- (1) on a case-by-case basis for this less than 1 year of age;
- (2) can be considered, but is not routinely recommended, for those 1 to 5 years of age; and
- (3) can be considered in those 18 to 64 years of age.



For other patient scenarios, antiviral dosing, side effects and contraindications refer to “*Antiviral Medications for Seasonal Influenza: Information for Health Care Providers, 2019*” available at:
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/qa-antiviral-medication-influenza.pdf?la=en>

Antivirals to prevent influenza

Antiviral medications are recommended for prevention in institutional influenza outbreaks, such as in long-term care homes, retirement homes and hospitals. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) is the preferred antiviral because it is administered orally. It should be initiated as soon as possible in an influenza outbreak to prevent further spread in the facility, ideally within the first 48 hours.

Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) is recommended for prevention in the following groups during an influenza outbreak in an institutional setting:

- ✓ Residents/patients who are not ill with influenza symptoms and are located within the outbreak area, regardless of immunization status
- ✓ Unvaccinated staff members
- ✓ Vaccinated staff members when there is a mismatch between the vaccine and circulating influenza strains, based on consultation with public health officials

During an institutional outbreak, oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) should be started as soon as possible in the outbreak and continued until the outbreak is declared over. Rapid initiation of antivirals for prophylaxis is very important to helping prevent the spread of influenza. For dosage and information on using antiviral drugs, consult “*Antiviral Medications for Seasonal Influenza: Information for Health Care Providers, 2019*” available at:
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/qa-antiviral-medication-influenza.pdf?la=en>.

Contact York Region Public Health

For more information on treatment and prevention of influenza, contact YRPH at **1-877-464-9675 ext. 73588**.

Resources

Public Health Ontario: Antiviral Medications for Seasonal Influenza: Information for Health Care Providers, 2019

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/qa-antiviral-medication-influenza.pdf?la=en>

AMMI Canada Guidelines: Use of Antiviral Drugs for Seasonal Influenza: Foundation Document for Practitioners – Update 2019.

<https://jammi.utpjournals.press/doi/10.3138/jammi.2019.02.08>

Connect to york.ca/healthprofessionals for insights on current public health topics, up-to-date information and resources from York Region Public Health’s programs and services. Visit the **Announcements and Resources** page for our latest communications and to subscribe to our quarterly e-newsletter *Public Health Matters*, which covers topics relevant to today’s health care professionals.