

Tamiflu® (also known as Oseltamivir)

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

An outbreak of influenza (also known as the flu) is occurring in this facility. A drug called oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) can help prevent the spread of a flu outbreak. The following question-and-answer sheet has been created to help you or the person you represent decide whether to take this medication.

What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza is a viral illness spread from person to person by coughing or through contact with nasal fluids. It is most common in the late fall and winter.

Symptoms may include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and extreme fatigue, lasting for two to seven days. The flu can make heart, lung and kidney problems worse and can result in pneumonia, hospitalization and sometimes death. It is estimated that about 4,000 Canadians die from influenza complications every year.

Is a flu shot enough protection?

Hospital patients and personal care home residents are often seniors who may suffer from one or more chronic illnesses. These factors can result in a weaker immune system response to the flu shot.

While the flu vaccine prevents infection in 70 per cent of healthy adults, it is only about half as effective in seniors with chronic illness. However, it is still important for everyone age 65 and older to get an annual flu shot because the shot gives added protection against getting a severe case of the flu.

Influenza outbreaks are common in personal care homes, even when residents are vaccinated. When they get sick with the flu, about 10 per cent of personal care home residents may have to be admitted to hospital.

What is oseltamivir (Tamiflu®)?

Oseltamivir is a prescription drug effective in treating and preventing influenza. It is a capsule that is taken by mouth.

Oseltamivir is a medication that can control outbreaks caused by the influenza virus. In addition, it has been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms and complications as a result of the flu.

What are the side effects?

The most common side effects are nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. This does not happen with very many people who take the drug and the effects do not last long. If these side effects do occur, they usually happen after the first dose. Taking the drug with food may reduce these side effects.

More serious reactions have been reported but the medication has not been proven to be the cause.

Does oseltamivir interact with other drugs?

Current information does not show that there are any clinically important interactions with other medications.

How long do I take this drug?

Oseltamivir is usually given for about 10 days, the average time that a flu outbreak lasts.

What happens if I get the flu while taking the drug?

Since oseltamivir can reduce symptoms and complications, it can help to fight the flu when someone has already caught the virus. In such cases, a higher dose of oseltamivir is usually prescribed for five days and then stopped.

Do I have to take oseltamivir?

No. You can choose if you wish to take oseltamivir or not. No changes will be made to any care or treatment that you are already receiving or that of the person you are representing.

Is there a cost?

In an outbreak situation, the medication is provided at no charge by Manitoba Health when used for prevention.

Who should not take oseltamivir?

- You should not take this medication if you had a previous severe allergic reaction to oseltamivir.
- If you suffer from severe kidney disease you should check first with the doctor prescribing oseltamivir.
- Oseltamivir should be used during pregnancy only if the potential benefit justifies the potential risk to the fetus. Oseltamivir should not be used by mothers breastfeeding infants under one year of age.

More information?

If you have other questions about oseltamivir or its use, please contact the doctor prescribing this medication at your personal care home or hospital for more information.

Local Public Health Unit Stamp