

# COVID-19 and flu antiviral medicines

## Advice for people at high risk of severe illness



This factsheet is for people at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and influenza (flu) infection, and their loved ones, to help guide decisions about using antiviral medicines for treatment and prevention.

COVID-19 and flu can cause severe illness and are circulating in the community.

If you do catch COVID-19 or flu there are antiviral medicines available that can reduce your risk of becoming very sick and needing hospital care. Antiviral medicines are also important in reducing your risk of spreading the disease to others. These medicines work best when they are taken as soon as possible after symptoms start. It is important to speak to your loved ones and your GP before you become unwell with COVID-19 or flu, to see if antiviral medicines are the right option for you so that you can receive them quickly if you need them. Your GP can pre-assess your suitability for antiviral medicines using either:

- [Pre-assessment action plan for respiratory infections](#) – for adults who are at higher risk of severe disease
- [Pre-assessment action plan for respiratory infections in aged care facility residents](#) - for aged care residents

## COVID-19

Your best protection against severe illness or death from COVID-19 is to ensure you are up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations, including having a first and second [booster](#) dose. Booster doses can be given 3 months after your last dose, or 3 months after a confirmed COVID-19 infection.

### Antiviral medicines for COVID-19

Antiviral medicines can help reduce how severe your illness is which means you are less likely to go to hospital, develop breathing difficulties, need oxygen or intensive care treatment, or die from COVID-19. It's important to know that antivirals are not a substitute for vaccination. Antiviral medicines can only be prescribed by a doctor to people who have tested positive for COVID-19.

There are two oral antiviral medicines for COVID-19 available in Australia called Lagevrio® (molnupiravir) and Paxlovid® (nirmatrelvir + ritonavir). These medicines are available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) in Australia and are heavily subsidised for patients who meet specific [PBS eligibility criteria](#).

Talk to your GP about being assessed for COVID-19 antiviral medicines before you get COVID-19 so you can receive them as soon as you need them. Your GP will be able to explain if COVID-19 antiviral medicines are suitable for you and will also give you information on any possible side effects.

Read more about COVID-19 antivirals: [Antivirals - your questions answered](#)

## Flu

Your best protection against flu is for you to get a free annual flu vaccination. The flu virus changes every year which means a new flu vaccine is prepared each year to best match the strains for the coming flu season.

Flu can circulate in the community all year round. Talk to your GP about your options to protect yourself against the flu by getting vaccinated.

### Antiviral medicines for flu

Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) is a prescription medicine that can be used in two ways.

1. It can prevent you from getting the flu if you have been close to someone who has it, or
2. If you have flu, it can help stop you getting very sick and may prevent hospitalisation and death.

Talk to your GP about being assessed for oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) before you are exposed to or develop flu so you can receive it as soon as you need it. Your GP will be able to explain any possible side effects.

For more information on oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) see [Antivirals for influenza – information for prescribers](#).