

Infectious diseases A to Z: New flu antiviral available

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For those who become ill with the flu, a new antiviral medication may help. "This is really kind of a blockbuster," says Dr. Gregory Poland, director of the Mayo Clinic Vaccine Research Group. "We have not had a new influenza antiviral drug in a couple of decades."

"New in this last year is baloxivir, an antiviral drug that can be used to treat influenza and only takes one dose. If you develop symptoms of influenza, and you're elderly or have [medical problems](#), we now have a drug where we can administer one dose and treat this virus very effectively if you get in to be seen within 48 hours of developing symptoms," says Dr. Poland.

The medication can help lessen symptoms and shorten the amount of time of the illness. It is especially important for those who are at high risk of developing complications from the flu virus, including those over age 65 and those with chronic medical problems, such as [heart disease](#), diabetes and [lung disease](#).

Most healthy people who become ill with the flu recover on their own and won't need medical care or antivirals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends those at high risk of serious flu complications contact their health care provider for the best treatment options.

Baloxivar is one of four [antiviral drugs](#) approved by the Food and Drug Administration and recommended by the CDC. It is only licensed for those 12 and older. Other antiviral prescription medications include oseltamivir, zanamivir, and peramivir.

Those at high risk of flu complications are:

- Young children under age 5, and especially those under 1 year
- Adults over 65—Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Pregnant women and women up to two weeks postpartum
- People with weakened immune systems
- People who have chronic illnesses, such as asthma, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease and diabetes

- People with a body mass index of 40 or higher

Antiviral medication is not a substitute for the flu vaccine. The CDC recommends that everyone over 6 months get a flu shot annually.

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