

Information for People Exposed to Influenza of Zoonotic Origin (Bird Flu): Taking OSELTAMIVIR (Tamiflu®)

What is Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®)?

Oseltamivir (brand name *Tamiflu*®) is an antiviral medicine used to **treat or prevent influenza (flu)**. It comes as a capsule or liquid. Oseltamivir has been used safely in many countries for a number of years and is one of the recommended medicines for people who may have been exposed to influenza of zoonotic origin (“bird flu”).

Why have I been advised to take it?

You have been in close contact with birds or animals that may be infected with the influenza of zoonotic origin (“bird flu”) virus. This means there is a **very small risk** that you could become infected.

Influenza of zoonotic origin (“bird flu”) can cause serious illness in people, so antiviral medicine can be offered as a precaution.

What are the benefits of taking this medication?

Oseltamivir can:

- **reduce the chance of the virus causing infection**, and
- **reduce the likelihood or severity of illness** if infection does occur.

It is most effective when taken as advised by your doctor or public health team.

What are the risks or side effects of taking it?

Like all medicines, this medicine can cause side effects, although not everybody gets them. Most people take oseltamivir without any problems.

The most common side effects include:

- Headache; nausea; vomiting; and stomach ache or stomach cramps.

The frequency of these effects is reduced if the medicinal product is taken with food. These usually occur after the first dose and often settle quickly.

Less common side effects include:

- Dizziness; tiredness; difficulties sleeping; cough or mild breathing symptoms

These side effects can resemble flu symptoms. **If you feel unwell while taking oseltamivir, contact your doctor or the Public Health team for advice.**

Serious side effects are rare, but if you develop rash, swelling, trouble breathing, bleeding, confusion, changes in your mood or behaviour (especially in children and adolescents) , seek medical help immediately.

Will oseltamivir completely prevent illness?

No. Oseltamivir **reduces** the chance of becoming ill, but it **cannot guarantee** full protection. If you feel unwell at any time—especially with fever, cough, shortness of breath, or feeling generally unwell—**contact Public Health or your GP immediately.**

Before taking Oseltamivir (Tamiflu), is there anything I should tell the doctor?

Please let the doctor or Public Health team know **before** you start taking this antiviral if:

- you are taking any other medications, including those bought without a prescription (Oseltamivir can be taken with paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin unless you have been advised otherwise)
- you have any **drug allergies**
- you have any **kidney problems** or have been told your kidneys do not work normally
- you are **pregnant**, think you may be pregnant, or are **breastfeeding**
- **your immune system is not working**

This helps ensure that Oseltamivir is safe and suitable for you.

How should I take the antiviral medicine?

Your public health doctor will tell you how long to take the medicine for.

You will usually be asked to take:

- **one dose each day while you remain exposed**, and
- **one dose each day for 10 days after the last exposure.**

To take the medication correctly:

- Swallow the capsule whole with a full glass of water.
- Do not break or chew the capsule.
- If possible, take it with breakfast or food to reduce nausea.
- If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember—**do not** take a double dose.

These antiviral medicines work to protect you against becoming ill. It is very important that you continue to take the capsules until the course is finished, even if you feel well.

If you have any queries, please contact one of the Public Health doctors at the number above.

To find out more about influenza of zoonotic origin, visit www.hpsc.ie.