

Tamiflu to Treat Swine Flu, including details for travellers taking supplies with them.

What is Tamiflu?

Tamiflu (Oseltamivir 75mg) is an antiviral medication. It works by reducing the replication of flu viruses, so stopping the spread of the flu virus throughout your body.

How effective is Tamiflu at treating Swine Flu?

At the moment Tamiflu seems to be effective at treating Swine Flu, when taken within 2 days of experiencing flu symptoms. It doesn't stop the Swine Flu but the illness may be shortened by a day and reduce the risk of complications.

What are the side-effects of Tamiflu?

As with all medicines, Tamiflu can cause side-effects, but not everybody gets them. The most common side-effects of Tamiflu are nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach ache and headache, but these most commonly occur after the first dose and usually stop as the treatment is continued. If you take the medicine with food it will reduce these effects.

There are less common side-effects associated with Tamiflu but many of these are similar to flu symptoms, such as bronchitis, dizziness, tiredness, upper abdominal fullness and sleeping difficulties. More detailed information about side-effects can be found in the patient information leaflet which accompanies the Tamiflu.

Who shouldn't take Tamiflu?

It is not known if it is safe for pregnant or breastfeeding women to take Tamiflu, but the benefit of taking it may outweigh the potential risk to the foetus. This should be carefully discussed with your Doctor before you consider taking the medication. Zanamivir (Relenza) is the recommended treatment in pregnancy where available and is taken by inhalation.

If you are allergic to other medicines or have problems with your kidneys you should tell your Doctor before travelling, in case you need to take the Tamiflu whilst away.

Should I consider taking Tamiflu with me?

1. Swine flu is usually a mild condition in healthy individuals and in the majority of cases treatment with Tamiflu will not be necessary.
2. Tamiflu is not necessary to take as a personal supply to those countries where swine flu has not yet been reported or where there are very few cases (see WHO website for daily updates and map <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>)
3. Tamiflu is not necessary to take as a personal supply to those countries where reliable supplies can easily be obtained e.g. the United States.

4. we recommend the following travellers should consider the use of Tamiflu if they develop symptoms of swine flu and if they come into the following categories:

- people with chronic lung disease,
- people with chronic heart disease,
- people with chronic kidney disease,
- people with chronic liver disease,
- people with chronic neurological disease,
- people with suppressed immune systems (whether caused by disease or treatment),
- people with diabetes,
- people who have had drug treatment for their asthma within the past three years,
- pregnant women (Relenza preferred),
- people aged 65 years and older, and
- Young children under five years old.

For further information see:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx>

When should Tamiflu be taken?

If you develop flu-like symptoms whilst away you should seek medical advice. This can be either by contacting a local Doctor, or in an emergency contacting InterHealth.

If your Doctor has recommended that you take Tamiflu away with you, and it is not possible for you to seek medical advice, the Health Protection Agency in the UK stipulates the following criteria for deciding when to treat Swine flu-like symptoms:

- Fever [temperature $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$] or a history of fever, AND
- influenza-like illness (TWO OR MORE of the following symptoms: cough; sore throat; rhinorrhoea (runny nose); limb or joint pain; headache; vomiting or diarrhoea) OR
- severe and/or life-threatening illness suggestive of an infectious process

If you fit into this criterion the Tamiflu should be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Please note. The symptoms of swine flu can easily mimic other conditions such as malaria, and a range of viral illnesses including dengue fever, especially in the early stages. This makes it important you seek medical advice where possible, especially if you may have been exposed to malaria or another widespread illness in your area whose symptoms are similar to swine flu.

How should Tamiflu be taken?

To treat Swine Flu:

Adults from 13 years of age: Take one capsule as soon as possible after diagnosis and then take one capsule twice a day. It is important to complete the whole 5 day course, even if you feel better.

Children over the age of one can also take Tamiflu under medical supervision and at a reduced dose as follows:

- Body weight under 15Kg, 30mg every 12 hours,
- Body weight 15-23 Kg, 45 mg every 12 hours
- Body weight 23-40 Kg, 60mg every 12 hours

Tamiflu capsules should be swallowed whole with water. Do not break or chew the capsules. Tamiflu can be taken with or without food, although it is recommended that you take it with food to reduce the chances of feeling or being sick.

It is not currently recommended that you take Tamiflu if you have simply been in touch with a suspected or confirmed case of swine flu, but you are well with no symptoms yourself. The exception to this is if you come into a serious risk category, see above, because of a pre-existing medical condition.

How can I avoid catching Swine Flu?

General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including the human swine influenza. This includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people. Use an alcohol based hand cleaning gel if no water is available.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure your children follow this advice.
- Avoid large gatherings of people to prevent the virus from spreading.
- It is considered prudent for people who are ill to delay international travel and for people developing symptoms following international travel to seek medical attention, in line with guidance from national authorities.

Further Information and Guidance

Travellers should follow the advice given by the Departments of Health in their country of origin. Information for those based in or travelling from the UK are to be found on the websites below which are regularly updated. These should answer all your questions about swine flu:

http://www.nathnac.org/pro/clinical_updates/flu_200709.htm

<http://www.nathnac.org/pro/factsheets/h1n1.htm>

As from July 16th The World Health Organisation suspended its routine country-by-country tracking of the numbers of confirmed swine flu cases as this was becoming impossible to maintain with any accuracy. It is assumed this swine flu will now spread to virtually all countries.

www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/

There is a clear question and answer section on the NHS website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx>

Further country-by-country information is available on the Foreign and Commonwealth website:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu>

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