
COVID-19 Antiviral Medications in Long-Term Care

Frequently Asked Questions

What are antiviral medications?

Antivirals are drugs that attack viruses in your body. The FDA has granted emergency use authorization (EUA) for two oral antiviral medications that treat COVID-19 infections. In clinical trials, both were proven safe and effective. Effectiveness varies depending on the medication prescribed, but antivirals can reduce the risk of hospitalization and death up to 88%.

Who can get antiviral medication?

Long-term care residents and people with underlying health conditions are the most likely to benefit from antiviral drugs. It is currently available to residents who are infected with COVID-19. However, these medications are not recommended for everyone, including those who take certain medications. A healthcare provider can advise which option is best for you and may recommend another treatment called monoclonal antibodies instead.

When should antiviral medication be given?

Antiviral therapy is most effective when given **early** and **the sooner it is given, the better**. It must be started **within 5 days** of developing symptoms to be helpful. Providing information about possible treatments before an outbreak occurs can help residents and families make timely decisions and avoid treatment delays should infection occur.

What are possible side effects and other considerations of antiviral medications?

Paxlovid is given as 3 tablets taken twice daily for 5 days. The tablets cannot be chewed or crushed so people unable to swallow pills should not take this medication. Paxlovid can also interact with several other medications and people with kidney disease may need different dosing. Possible side effects include:

- altered sense of taste
- diarrhea
- high blood pressure
- muscle aches

While uncommon, Paxlovid may cause liver problems, especially for those who already have liver disease. Paxlovid is not recommended for individuals with severe liver or kidney disease.

Molnupiravir is given as 4 capsules given twice daily for 5 days. The capsules cannot be opened or crushed so people unable to swallow pills should not take this medication. Molnupiravir is less effective

than Paxlovid, but still offers some protection and can be safely given with most medications. Possible side effects may include:

- diarrhea
- dizziness
- nausea

Molnupiravir should not be taken by anyone who is breastfeeding or pregnant or who may become pregnant while taking this medication. Men with partners of childbearing age should use contraception while taking this medication and for 3 months afterward as effects on sperm are unknown.

How much does antiviral therapy cost?

The medication is paid for by the federal government and can be administered to long-term care residents in their facility at no cost to the resident. There may be a cost for blood work if labs are needed, but this is covered by Medicare and Medicaid as well as most private insurance plans.

Where can I find more information?

You can find more information on each of the medication options here:

Paxlovid: <https://www.fda.gov/media/155051/download>

Molnupiravir: <https://www.fda.gov/media/155055/download>