**LEHIGH UNIVERSITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER**

**What You Should Know About Flu Antiviral Drugs**

**What are antiviral drugs?**

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu in your body. While CDC recommends flu vaccine as the first and most important step in preventing flu, antiviral drugs are a second line of defense against the flu. Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics. You can only get them if you have a prescription from your doctor or health care provider.

**What antiviral drugs are recommended for flue seasons?**

The Health and Wellness Center prescribes antivirals based on CDC recommendations. Tamiflu® (the generic name for this drug is oseltamivir) will be prescribed during this flu season. Tamiflu® is available as a pill or liquid.

**Who should take antiviral drugs?**

It’s very important that the antiviral drug be used early to treat flu in people who are very sick with flu (for example, people who are in the hospital) and people who are sick with flu and have a greater chance of getting serious flu complications. Other people may also be treated with antiviral drugs by their provider this season. Most healthy people with flu, however, do not need to be treated with antiviral drugs.

**What are the benefits of antiviral drugs?**

When used for treatment, this drug can make you feel better and shorten the time you are sick by 1 or 2 days. It can also prevent serious flu complications.

**When should antiviral drugs be taken for treatment?**

Studies have shown that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatment if they are started within 2 days of getting sick. There may still be benefit in treating people with antiviral drugs even after 2 days have gone by, especially if the sick person has a greater chance of serious flu complications or if the person has certain symptoms (such as shortness of breath, chest pain/pressure, dizziness, or confusion) or is in the hospital because of the flu.

**How long should antiviral drugs be taken?**

To treat flu, tamiflu® is usually taken for 5 days.

**What are the side effects of antiviral drugs?**

Tamiflu® has been in use since 1999. The most common side effects are nausea or vomiting which usually happen in the first 2 days of treatment. Taking tamiflu® with food can reduce the chance of getting these side effects.

Confusion and abnormal behavior leading to injury has been observed rarely in people with the flu, mostly children, who were treated with tamiflu®. Flu can also cause these behaviors. But persons taking this drug should be closely monitored for signs of unusual behavior or problems thinking clearly. This behavior should be immediately reported to a health care provider.

For more information visit <http://www.flu.gove/>, <http://www.cdc.gove/flu> or call 800-CDC-INFO