

National Policy Recommendations on the Use of Antivirals for Prevention during an Influenza Pandemic

This fact sheet provides information for health care workers about Antivirals for Prophylaxis (prevention).

The Government of Ontario has released a report from the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network Council (PHNC) concerning the use of antiviral medications for prophylaxis (prevention) during an influenza pandemic.

The PHNC is an expert advisory body created by the federal, provincial and territorial governments to facilitate inter-governmental dialogue and collaboration on public health issues. The PHNC appointed a Task Group on Antivirals for Prophylaxis (TGAP) with relevant expertise (i.e. communicable diseases, public health, emergency management, ethics, legal, First Nations and Inuit and communications) to review the public policy merit of using antivirals for prevention during an influenza pandemic. After 18 months of careful analysis and consultation, TGAP concluded that, based on current knowledge, the use of antiviral medications for prophylaxis during an influenza pandemic could be recommended to governments to:

- prevent illness among individuals who had been in close contact with an infected person in the period immediately preceding the declaration of a pandemic, and
- control outbreaks in closed, high-risk facilities during the pandemic period.

TGAP also proposed a number of corollary recommendations to strengthen pan-Canadian pandemic preparedness and response capacity.

TGAP's conclusion that the widespread use of antivirals for prophylaxis during a pandemic is not justifiable at this time is based on a number of factors. They include, among others: the limited availability of data on the efficacy of antivirals when used for prophylaxis; the unknown health and safety risks of administering a drug with known side effects to a large number of healthy people for a prolonged period (as well as the difficulties of ensuring compliance with the course of treatment); and, the risk of resistant strains of the virus developing. It is also premised on the adoption of TGAP's corollary recommendations, which emphasize the need for a comprehensive communications strategy on the pan-Canadian pandemic influenza plan, strengthened occupational health and safety measures, including infection control in healthcare delivery settings, and additional research.

The Government of Ontario will use the policy recommendations on the use of antivirals for prophylaxis as a guide for approaching pandemic preparedness and response in the event of a pandemic outbreak. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term care will continue to review the guidelines and hold further consultations with stakeholders to develop a provincial policy on the use of antiviral medications for prophylaxis.

Learn more about the Government of Ontario's [pandemic preparedness strategy](#).

Read the [Executive Summary](#) of the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network Council Report and Policy Recommendations on the Use of Antivirals for Prophylaxis during an Influenza Pandemic.

Read the [Pan-Canadian Public Health Network Council Report and Policy Recommendations](#) on the Use of Antivirals for Prophylaxis during an Influenza Pandemic.

Read the [EKOS Research Final Findings Report](#) on Citizen and Stakeholder Deliberative Dialogues on the Use of Antivirals for Prevention during an Influenza Pandemic.