Q: If I get sick with flu or COVID-19, what are my treatment options?

A: Antiviral medications may be an option to lessen the symptoms and shorten the time you are sick if you have flu or COVID-19. Starting antiviral treatment early can reduce the risk of some complications.

Timely and important antiviral facts:

Antivirals work best if taken early, ideally as soon as possible after symptom onset, and within:
- **2 days** for flu
- **5–7 days** for COVID-19

Treatment can be especially important if you're at **higher risk for severe illness,** even if your symptoms are mild.
- This includes people at high risk themselves or people who live with or care for them.

If you are at higher risk, **contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible** after your symptoms begin regarding testing and antiviral treatment for COVID-19 or flu.

What to know about antivirals:

Antivirals are **prescription-only medications that are specific to the virus they treat.** Do not take them for other infections.

They work by **targeting the virus inside of your body** so it can't multiply.

They are not sold over the counter — you need a prescription.

If you don't have a healthcare provider and have tested positive for flu or COVID-19, contact your local pharmacy, community health center, or health department about antiviral treatments.

CDC