FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

TREATMENT OPTIONS for Mild COVID-19

We used information from Health Canada, the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, and published research to make this guide.

- **What is “mild” COVID-19?**
  Mild COVID-19 means that you have tested positive for COVID-19 and have symptoms, but you are not sick enough to need extra oxygen. Symptoms of mild COVID-19 can include a cough, sore throat, headache, runny or stuffy nose, nausea, diarrhea, muscle aches, fever, low energy, and/or a change in taste or smell. Mild COVID-19 can quickly become more severe.

- **What drugs can be used to treat mild COVID-19?**
  There are four drugs that can be used for mild COVID-19. One or more may be recommended for you:
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir (Paxlovid™)</td>
<td>An antiviral drug taken by mouth. It stops the COVID-19 virus from making copies of itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remdesivir (Veklury™)</td>
<td>An antiviral drug given intravenously. It stops the COVID-19 virus from making copies of itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluvoxamine (Luvox®)</td>
<td>An antidepressant drug with anti-inflammatory effects taken by mouth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Budesonide (Pulmicort®)</td>
<td>A common inhaled anti-inflammatory drug, often used to treat asthma or COPD</td>
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- **Are COVID-19 drugs recommended for me?**
  If you are at higher risk of hospitalization from COVID-19, treatment may be recommended for you. Treatments are not recommended for everyone with mild COVID-19. We do not know yet if people who have a lower risk of hospitalization from COVID-19 will benefit from these drugs. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider. They can help advise whether you would benefit from this medication.

You may be at higher risk of hospitalization if you:
- Are unvaccinated or have only 1 or 2 vaccine doses
- Are over 60 years old
- Are pregnant
- Have a weakened immune system
  - This includes people who have specific health conditions (e.g., common variable immunodeficiency [CVID]) or who take certain drugs that affect the immune system (e.g., chemotherapy)
- Have other health risks
  - Examples of health conditions include obesity, diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability (e.g., Down syndrome), and sickle cell disease.

The Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table makes recommendations about COVID-19 treatments using the most recent information. You can find COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines here: https://covid19-scencetable.ca/science-briefs/#infectious-diseases-clinical-care
- **Do I need to have a positive COVID-19 test to get treatment?**
  Yes. A test is needed to confirm that you have COVID-19. A PCR test (polymerase chain reaction) is preferred. Rapid antigen tests (RAT) may also be used (in-person, or in some cases, at home).

- **I have tested positive but I don’t have symptoms. Would I benefit from treatment?**
  No. Mild COVID-19 is treated to prevent it from becoming severe. If you do not have any symptoms, it is unlikely you will develop severe COVID-19. If you develop symptoms after becoming positive, you should be assessed for treatment.

- **How soon does treatment need to start after my symptoms begin?**
  Paxlovid™ needs to be started within 5 days of the start of your symptoms. Remdesivir, fluvoxamine, budesonide need to be started within 7 days.

- **Where can I get these treatments? How much do they cost?**
  Drugs like Paxlovid™ and remdesivir are available for free. In many parts of Canada, you can get Paxlovid™ through a COVID-19 testing centre, primary care provider, or pharmacy. Remdesivir is given in an infusion centre or a hospital clinic. Fluvoxamine and budesonide can be prescribed by a primary care provider and filled at your pharmacy. There may be a fee for fluvoxamine and budesonide, depending on your prescription drug coverage.

- **How well do these drugs work?**
  These drugs have been shown to be helpful for people at higher risk of needing to be treated in hospital.

  Paxlovid™ was studied in unvaccinated people who had other health conditions. In the study, people were given Paxlovid within 5 days of their first COVID-19 symptoms. Paxlovid lowered the risk of needing to be treated in hospital or dying by 88%.

  Remdesivir was studied in people who had mild COVID-19 and at least one risk factor for needing to be treated in hospital. When given within 7 days of first COVID-19 symptoms, remdesivir lowered the risk of needing to be treated in hospital or dying by 87%.

  Fluvoxamine lowered the risk of needing to be treated in hospital by 32% when given to people at higher risk of severe COVID-19.

  The budesonide inhaler did not lower the risk of needing hospital care, but it did help people’s symptoms improve more quickly. It may be prescribed with Paxlovid, remdesivir, or fluvoxamine.

- **Are COVID-19 treatments recommended for children?**
  We do not know if these drugs will lower the risk of hospitalization for children. Children who have severely weakened immune systems might benefit from treatment. Families of such children should talk to their medical teams.

- **Are COVID-19 treatments recommended for pregnant people?**
  Yes. COVID-19 treatments are recommended for pregnant people who have not received any vaccine doses. Pregnant people who have not had any vaccines are at higher risk for needing to be cared for in hospital if they get COVID-19. COVID-19 infections during pregnancy are linked to much higher rates of hospitalization and premature birth.
What are the side effects of treatment?
Each drug has different side effects. Your prescriber will give you information about what to expect. Examples of some common side effects include:

- **Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir (Paxlovid™)**
  - Funny taste in the mouth, nausea, and diarrhea

- **Fluvoxamine (Luvox®)**
  - Nausea, constipation, dry mouth, difficulty sleeping, and feelings of nervousness

- **Remdesivir (Veklury®)**
  - Warmth or pain at the injection site, rash, headache, and nausea

- **Budesonide (Pulmicort®)**
  - Cough, throat irritation, thrush, and hoarse voice

Is it safe to take these drugs with my other prescriptions?
It is important to review all drugs that you use with your prescriber and pharmacist. This includes natural health products like St. John’s wort and drugs like fentanyl. Paxlovid™ and fluvoxamine can interact with many drugs. Remdesivir and budesonide have fewer drug interactions. As Paxlovid and fluvoxamine can interact with many drugs, you may need to change your regular medications for a short period.

I live in a rural or remote community. Can I still get treatment?
Yes. If you have a higher risk of developing severe COVID-19, and you live a long distance from a hospital or COVID-19 testing centre, it is even more important that you ask about treatment for mild COVID-19. If you live in a rural or remote community, you may be assessed over the phone and treatment may be mailed to you to take at home.

Why are COVID-19 treatments recommended more strongly for people who have not been vaccinated yet?
People who have not been vaccinated yet are at higher risk of needing to be treated in hospital than most people who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines. We do not know if these drugs will benefit most people who have had all recommended vaccines. Right now, the risks of side effects and drug interactions are greater than the known benefits of treatments for most people whose vaccines are up to date.

The best way to protect yourself from becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19 is to get every vaccine dose recommended for you.


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