

The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) has recently issued guidelines for doctors regarding the use of anti-viral medications for treating the swine flu. While these recommendations aren't designed for the general public, they provide some information that I believe is worthwhile for everyone.

First it is important to remind everyone that antibiotics do not treat the flu as the flu is a virus and antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses. It hasn't been until recently that there were any medications that had any affect on viruses like the flu. Now there are a number of antiviral medications. The most well known is Tamiflu.

These antiviral medications are not nearly as effective in treating viral infections as antibiotics are in treating bacterial infections. When used soon enough, they have been shown in some research to reduce the length of a viral infection by a small percentage.

There are several medications that the W.H.O. released recommendations for. One, Osteltamivir, was recommended for infected individuals with severe or progressive illness. Zanamivir, another medication, was recommended when Osteltamivir was not effective or available.

For both of these drugs, the W.H.O. admits that there was little to very little good evidence that these are scientifically valid recommendations. Never-the-less, they made the recommendations anyway.

The W.H.O. stated that antiviral medications are not recommended for low risk groups with uncomplicated cases of the flu. Individuals W.H.O. fit into the low risk group are individuals between the ages of 5 and 65 unless they are women W.H.O. are pregnant or patients with some other illnesses including those that weaken the immune system.

For those who are 5 and under or those who are over 65 with uncomplicated cases, use of one of these drugs is not recommend. The W.H.O. also advised that for most people, taking an antiviral drug was not effective in preventing the flu or making a case of the flu less severe.

Again, for all of these recommendations, they admit that there is little supportive evidence.

Although these recommendations were developed for doctors, you can use them to help you make your own decisions. If you develop the flu and you are not in the at risk group, then it is probably best to just stay home and drink fluids and rest until you recover. There is little that a doctor can do for you, since according to these recommendations, the antiviral medications are not likely to be especially effective.