Eligibility guide for COVID-19 antiviral medicines

COVID-19 antiviral medicines reduce the amount of COVID-19 virus in your body. These antiviral medicines can help people with COVID-19 who are likely to get seriously ill, be less sick and stay out of hospital.

This guide helps explain who can get free antiviral medicines (Paxlovid and molnupiravir), to reduce their risk of hospitalisation.

These antiviral medicines need to be started within 5 days of symptoms starting. They are prescribed by GPs and some pharmacists for people who have caught COVID-19 (or are probable cases) and are at high risk of serious COVID-19 illness.

For overall health, your usual healthcare provider or pharmacy will check the latest information on Te Pātaka Whaioranga - Pharmac’s website and the person’s other medical conditions, before giving any antiviral medicines. Some medical conditions mean these antiviral medicines are not possible.

People at high risk of serious COVID-19 illness can get free antiviral medicine, if:

- they have just caught COVID-19 (or they are a probable case); and
- their symptoms started within 5 days;

AND they fit in one of these five groups:

People ‘at risk for one reason’

Those at risk for one reason of serious illness from COVID-19 can get antiviral medicine without any other conditions or factors. This group is anyone who either:

- is aged 75 years or older; or
- is immunocompromised; or
- has Down syndrome; or
- has sickle cell disease; or
- has previously been in intensive care/ICU because of COVID-19.

This is regardless of the person’s age, vaccination status, ethnicity, or the number of other high-risk medical conditions they may have.
‘Less vaccinated’ Māori and Pacific people

‘Less vaccinated’ people who are Māori or Pacific, and they have not been given at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccination:

- people in this group aged 50 years and over can get antiviral medicine – without any other conditions or factors
- ages under 50 years can still get antiviral medicine – if they have three or more high-risk medical conditions for severe COVID-19 illness
- anyone in this group who is also in the ‘at risk for one reason’ group (above) can get antiviral medicine regardless, including people aged 75 years or older.

‘More vaccinated’ Māori and Pacific people

‘More vaccinated’ people who are Māori or Pacific, and they have been given at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccination:

- people in this group aged 65 and over can get antiviral medicine – if they have two or more high-risk medical conditions for severe COVID-19 illness
- ages 50 to 64 years can get antiviral medicine – if they have three or more high-risk medical conditions
- ages under 50 years can get antiviral medicine – if they have four or more high-risk medical conditions
- anyone in this group who is also in the ‘at risk for one reason’ group can get antiviral medicine regardless, including people aged 75 years or older.
‘Less vaccinated’ people – who are not of Māori or Pacific ethnicity

‘Less vaccinated’ people who are not of Māori or Pacific ethnicity, and they have not been given at least two COVID-19 vaccinations:

- people in this group aged 65 years and over can get antiviral medicine – without any other conditions or factors
- ages 50 to 64 years can still get antiviral medicine – if they have three or more high-risk medical conditions for severe COVID-19 illness
- ages under 50 years can get antiviral medicine – if they have four or more high-risk medical conditions
- anyone in this group who is also in the ‘at risk for one reason’ group can get antiviral medicine regardless, including people aged 75 years or older.

‘More vaccinated’ people – who are not of Māori or Pacific ethnicity

‘More vaccinated’ people who are not of Māori or Pacific ethnicity, and they have been given at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccination:

- people in this group aged 65 and over can still get antiviral medicine – if they have three or more high-risk medical conditions for severe COVID-19 illness
- ages 50 to 64 years can get antiviral medicine – if they have four or more high-risk medical conditions
- ages 49 years and under can get antiviral medicine – if they have five or more high-risk medical conditions
- anyone in this group who is also in the ‘at risk for one reason’ group can get free antiviral medicine regardless, including people aged 75 years or older.

IMPORTANT: This guide is a simplified version of Te Pātaka Whaioranga - Pharmac’s access criteria, online at Pharmac Updated Access Criteria for antiviral COVID-19 treatments, at 18 July 2022. This may change later.