13 December 2022

# COVID-19 antiviral medicines

# Pharmacy guide for responding to public questions and requests

As part of summer planning, Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand’s COVID-19 Care in the Community team has put together this guide to help pharmacies respond to public questions about free COVID-19 antiviral medicines, including:

1. People wondering about their eligibility
2. People wanting a phone appointment with a pharmacist to get antivirals without a prescription
3. People with a prescription wanting antivirals

**If you don’t offer COVID-19 antivirals**

If you don’t offer these medicines, either with or without a prescription, you can still help customers with essential COVID-19 antivirals information and access.

* Give them the [Te Whatu Ora COVID-19 antiviral medicines factsheet](https://toolkit.covid19.govt.nz/assets/704216)
* Give them contact information for the nearest pharmacy that provides antivirals
* Let them know that more information is available at **COVID19.health.nz**

[Use Healthpoint.co.nz to find pharmacies that provide antivirals without a prescription](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/pharmacy/?serviceArea=im%3A1382476)

[Use Healthpoint.co.nz to find pharmacies that provide antivirals with a prescription](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/pharmacy/?serviceArea=im%3A1382475)

1. **People wondering about their eligibility**

Anyone working at the pharmacy can share the following information with people to help them understand who is eligible for free COVID-19 antiviral medicines. **It may be useful to provide this information to all staff.**

***People eligible for free COVID-19 antiviral medicines:***

* *Māori or Pacific people aged 50 or over*
* *everyone aged 65 or over*
* *anyone aged 50 or over with fewer than 2 COVID-19 vaccinations*
* *anyone with a* [*severely weakened immune system*](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/advice-people-covid-19/covid-19-medicines/eligibility-guide-covid-19-antiviral-medicines)
* *anyone with Down syndrome*
* *anyone with sickle cell disease*
* *anyone who has previously been in critical or high dependency hospital care from COVID-19*
* *anyone with 3 or more high-risk medical conditions*

***What are the high-risk medical conditions?***

* *chronic lung or airways disease*
* *serious heart conditions, such as congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease, rheumatic heart disease or congenital heart disease*
* *hypertension*
* *chronic neurological or neuromuscular disease*
* *diabetes*
* *chronic kidney disease*
* *severe liver disease, such as cirrhosis*
* *severe haematological disorders*
* *severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, bipolar or schizoaffective disorder*
* *active cancer*
* *morbid obesity (BMI greater than 35)*

You can share with people that if they fit into any of the above categories, they are eligible for free COVID-19 antivirals if they get sick with COVID-19 or are a household contact of someone with COVID-19 and have symptoms.

If they are not sure if they meet the criteria, or think they may not, you can give them the following advice:

*It’s best to discuss this further with the pharmacist or your usual healthcare provider. You may still be eligible for COVID-19 antiviral medicines, particularly if you have any underlying health conditions.*

You can then arrange for a pharmacist to speak with them further, if your pharmacy offers antivirals, or put them in touch with a pharmacy that does.

Please remind people that antivirals must be started within 5 days of becoming sick, so it’s best to have RATs on hand so they can test themselves as soon as they feel sick.

If you are a RAT collection centre or testing site, you can distribute this [Te Whatu Ora COVID-19 antiviral medicines flyer](https://toolkit.covid19.govt.nz/assets/704215) with RATs.

1. **People wanting a phone appointment with a pharmacist to get antivirals without a prescription**

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| **If you don’t offer antivirals, you can say:** | **If you only offer antivirals with a prescription, you can say:** | **If you offer antivirals without a prescription** |
| *We don’t offer COVID-19 antiviral medicines but I can put you in touch with a nearby pharmacy that does.*  [Provide contact info of nearest pharmacy].  [Use Healthpoint.co.nz to find pharmacies that provide antivirals without a prescription](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/pharmacy/?serviceArea=im%3A1382476) | *We can provide antiviral medicines but you’ll need a prescription or, if you prefer, I can put you in touch with a nearby pharmacy that offers antivirals without a prescription.*  *You can call your usual healthcare provider for a phone appointment to ask for a prescription.*  [Use Healthpoint.co.nz to find pharmacies that provide antivirals without a prescription](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/pharmacy/?serviceArea=im%3A1382476) | Arrange for the person to speak with a pharmacist for an assessment.  There is an online calculator to help clinicians assess if someone is eligible: [Pharmac assessment tool](https://pharmac.govt.nz/news-and-resources/covid19/access-criteria-for-covid-19-medicines/covid-antivirals/access-criteria-assessment-tool/)  Talk to the person about who will pick up their medicine (friends or whānau) or organise free delivery if needed. |

1. **People with a prescription wanting antivirals**

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| **If you don’t offer antivirals** | **If you offer antivirals (with a prescription)** |
| Direct them to the nearest pharmacy that offers antivirals.  [Use Healthpoint.co.nz to find pharmacies that provide antivirals with a prescription](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/pharmacy/?serviceArea=im%3A1382475) | Talk to the person about who will pick up their medicine (friends or whānau) or organise free delivery if needed. |

Thank you for supporting this rollout of COVID-19 antiviral medicines to at-risk people in your communities. If you have questions or feedback, please contact the COVID-19 Care in the Community team: [COVIDCareintheCommunity@health.govt.nz](mailto:COVIDCareintheCommunity@health.govt.nz).