

Prescribing and Clinical Effectiveness Bulletin

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INFLUENZA OUTBREAK 2010/11 AND ANTIVIRAL SUPPLY

Professor David Salisbury, Director of Immunisation at the Department of Health, notified all healthcare professionals on the 10th December 2010 that **influenza is now circulating in the community and that the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention and treatment of influenza is now recommended. As predicted earlier in the year**, pandemic H1N1 (2009) swine influenza is the predominant flu virus this flu season. The two antiviral drugs that can be used are oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza).

Treatment

According to NICE guidance, antivirals can be used when flu is circulating in the community and when a person with a flu-like illness is in an **'at-risk' group** and can start treatment **within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms** (or **within 36 hours for zanamivir treatment in children**) (NICE Technology Appraisal 168, *Amantadine, oseltamivir and zanamivir for the treatment of influenza* (February 2009)).

People **'at risk'** are defined as those with one or more of the following:

- chronic respiratory disease
- asthma that requires continuous or repeated use of inhaled or systemic steroids or with previous exacerbations requiring hospital admission
- chronic heart disease
- chronic renal disease
- chronic liver disease
- chronic neurological conditions (e.g. multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy)
- diabetes mellitus
- pregnancy
- aged 65 years or older
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment (e.g. steroid medication or cancer treatment)

In addition, in a letter from the Chief Medical Officer on the 14th December 2010, it was emphasized that **all children in 'at risk' groups presenting with symptoms and children with severe disease (necessitating hospital admission) should be started on oseltamivir without delay.**

A further CMO letter on the 21st December 2010, **extended the 'at risk' category further to include any patient that the GP feels is at serious risk of developing complications.**

The Immunisation Team Newsletter *Vaccine Update* (December 2010) also identifies those who have had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA) as being at risk of very serious illness if they contract flu.

Prevention

According to NICE guidance, antivirals can be used for the post-exposure prophylaxis of influenza when:

- flu is circulating in the community and
- the person is in an '**at-risk**' group (see above) and
- the person can start treatment **within 36 hours of contact with an index case for zanamivir and 48 hours for oseltamivir** (NICE Technology Appraisal 158, *Oseltamivir, amantadine and zanamivir for the prophylaxis of influenza* (September 2008)).

Dose and dosage forms

Oseltamivir (Tamiflu)

Post exposure prophylaxis and treatment doses of oseltamivir differ; course lengths are also longer for prophylaxis (see below):

Age if weight not known	Weight	Post-Exposure Prophylaxis	Treatment of Symptoms
Adults and children over 13 years	Over 40kg	75mg once a day for 10 days	75mg twice a day for 5 days
7 to under 13 years	23kg up to 40kg	60mg once a day for 10 days	60mg twice a day for 5 days
3 to under 7 years	15kg to 23kg	45mg once a day for 10 days	45mg twice a day for 5 days
Over 1 to under 3 years	Under 15kg	30mg once a day for 10 days	30mg twice a day for 5 days

Oseltamivir capsules are recommended for both adults and children over 1 year. They are manufactured in 30mg, 45mg, 60mg and 75mg strengths. When prescribed for children, the capsules can be opened and the powder contents stirred into one teaspoonful of chocolate or fudge dessert syrup or one teaspoonful (5ml) of undiluted concentrated blackcurrant drink (e.g. Ribena).

Zanamivir (Relenza)

Zanamivir dry powder for inhalation (Relenza) is inhaled through the Diskhaler device. Post exposure prophylaxis and treatment doses of zanamivir differ; course lengths are also longer for prophylaxis (see below):

Age	Post-Exposure Prophylaxis	Treatment of Symptoms
Adults and children over 5 years	10mg once daily for 10 days	10mg twice daily for 5 days

Pregnancy

Pregnant women appear to be at greater risk of serious complications if they catch H1N1 influenza; they are four times more likely to develop complications and ten times more likely to become so ill that they require hospitalisation (compared to women who are not pregnant). Zanamivir (Relenza) is the approved antiviral for the prevention and treatment of influenza in pregnancy. As Relenza is an inhaled formulation, lower levels of active drug appear in the blood, thus reducing foetal

exposure. There is little information about the safety of oseltamivir in human pregnancy, but animal studies are not suggestive of increased foetal risk. If Relenza is contra-indicated or unavailable, oseltamivir (Tamiflu) is a reasonable alternative in pregnancy.

Post-exposure prophylaxis is only indicated in pregnancy if the woman lives with a person who has or has had the symptoms of influenza. If the woman has been vaccinated against seasonal flu, a post exposure antiviral is not indicated.

Prescribing antivirals

Prescribers are reminded that all prescriptions for flu treatment should be endorsed with the reference 'SLS'. Pharmacists can only dispense antivirals at NHS expense if this endorsement is made.

Supply

During the early stages of this flu outbreak, availability of antiviral drugs has been limited. At the time of writing, supply information is changing on a daily basis. Prescribers are advised to contact either their local community pharmacist or their pharmaceutical wholesaler(s) or the manufacturer contact numbers listed below for a current update.

As of the 22nd December, small stocks of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) 30mg and 45mg capsules and zanamivir (Relenza) were available from Maltby's with the prospect of renewed supplies of oseltamivir 75mg capsules later today or tomorrow (22nd or 23rd December). The supply situation through AAH Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Alliance Healthcare Ltd is also likely to improve as the week goes on, although increased demand is likely to make supply over the Christmas and New Year period extremely precarious.

Standard advice from the centre is that emergency orders for next day delivery of oseltamivir may be processed through Roche Customer Care on 0800 731 5711. Similarly, for zanamivir (Relenza), emergency orders can be placed through the GlaxoSmithKline Customer Contact Centre on 0800 221 441. Feedback from community pharmacists suggests that this route of supply is not reliable at this time.

Pharmacies and dispensing surgeries are urged to only order what they need in response to patient demand. Stock-piling is likely to make this supply difficulty worse in the short-term.

Stocks of Tamiflu Powder for Oral Suspension 12mg/ml are severely limited and have been prioritised for paediatric use only. This formulation is being directed to hospitals only in view of the low stock situation

For information on antiviral supply contact your local community pharmacist or wholesaler or visit the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee website: www.psnc.org.uk The NHS Lincolnshire Prescribing and Medicines Management Team are also endeavouring to keep updated on the unfolding situation relating to antiviral supply. Contact Stephen Gibson (01522) 574175, Cathy Johnson (01205) 366273 ext 230 or Susan Ferguson (01529) 416080 for help and advice over the Christmas/New Year period.

Seasonal influenza vaccination

The target risk groups for seasonal influenza vaccination are:

- All those aged 65 years and over.
- All those aged 6 months and over in a clinical risk group.
- Those living in long-stay residential care homes or long-stay care facilities.
- Those in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an older or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if their carer falls ill
- Pregnant women at any stage of their pregnancy.
- All frontline health and social care professionals who come into contact with patients.
- Those who work in close contact with poultry.

References

Director of Immunisation's Letter, *Influenza Season 2010/11 – Use of Antivirals* (10th December 2010; Gateway Reference Number 15274)

Chief Medical Officer's Letter, *Treatment guidelines for patients with influenza 2010/11* (14th December 2010; Gateway Reference Number 15295)

Chief Medical Officer's Letter, *2010/11 Seasonal Influenza: Prescription of Antivirals*, (21st December 2010; Gateway Reference Number 15338)

NHS Direct/ UK Medicines Information, *NHS Direct Medicines Fact Sheet: Oseltamivir (Tamiflu)* (3rd December 2010)

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Technology Appraisal 168, *Amantadine, oseltamivir and zanamivir for the treatment of influenza* (February 2009)

NICE Technology Appraisal 158, *Oseltamivir, amantadine and zanamivir for the prophylaxis of influenza* (September 2008).

Department of Health, *Vaccine Update: The Immunisation Team Newsletter* (December 2010)

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