



CAS Alert

Influenza Season 2016/17: Use of Antiviral Medicines

19 December 2016

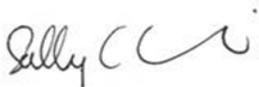
Alert reference number: **CEM/CMO/2016/005**

With surveillance data indicating an increase in influenza cases in the community, GPs and other prescribers working in primary care may now prescribe antiviral medicines for the prophylaxis and treatment of influenza at NHS expense. This is in accordance with NICE guidance, and Schedule 2 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) (Prescription of drugs etc) Regulations 2004, commonly known as the Grey List or Selected List Scheme (SLS).

Antiviral medicines may be prescribed for patients in “clinical at-risk groups” as well as any who are at risk of severe illness and/or complications from influenza if not treated.

Information on at risk groups and patients eligible for treatment in primary care at NHS expense with either oseltamivir (Tamiflu), or zanamivir (Relenza), is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/563029/PHE_guidance_antivirals_influenza_2016_to_2017_FINAL.pdf

Hospital clinicians may continue to prescribe antiviral medicines for patients whose illness is confirmed or strongly suspected, to be due to flu and who would suffer from medical complications if not treated.



Professor Dame Sally C Davies
Chief Medical Officer



Dr Keith Ridge CBE
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
Supporting NHS England, Department of Health and Health Education England

Actions

Who: Prescribers and Pharmacies

When: With immediate effect



Prescribers working in primary care may now prescribe and community pharmacists dispense antiviral medicines for the prophylaxis and treatment of influenza.



Primary care prescribers to endorse influenza antiviral prescriptions on an FP10 prescription form, SLS.



Pharmacies should order influenza antiviral medicines as needed.



All frontline healthcare workers to get vaccinated and observe strict infection control measures.



Clinicians treating hospitalised patients with suspected influenza to obtain rapid laboratory confirmation with subtype identification.

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Further information

It is important that adults and children start taking oseltamivir within 48 hours of onset of symptoms; For zanamivir, treatment should begin within 48 hours of onset of symptoms for adults and within 36 hours of onset of symptoms for children who are 5 years of age or over.

Prescribing for children over 12 months and adults who are not able to swallow capsules should be at the appropriate dose. The contents of the capsule should be added to a suitable sugary diluent. Where possible oseltamivir (Tamiflu) powder for suspension should be restricted for children under 1 year of age. This will ensure that there are adequate stocks in the supply chain, for this vulnerable group of patients.

Prescribing for children under 12 months: oseltamivir is indicated in children including full term neonates who present with symptoms typical of influenza, when influenza virus is circulating in the community. Efficacy has been demonstrated when treatment is initiated within two days of first onset of symptoms (Summary of Product Characteristics).

NICE guidance on the use of antiviral medicines can be accessed at: <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/TA168> for treatment, and <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/TA158> for prophylaxis.

Reports from PHE on influenza activity can be found on the GOV.UK website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/weekly-national-flu-reports>

The Department of Health is liaising with manufacturers to ensure adequate supplies are available in the NHS. Pharmacies are asked to not overstock to prevent shortages in the supply chain.

Communication:

NHS England Area Teams have been asked to cascade this alert to: GPs, community pharmacists, hospital pharmacists, nurses and A&E for action.

The alert has been sent for information to:

NHS Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
NHS Trusts (England) Medical Director
NHS Foundation Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
NHS Foundation Trusts (England) Medical Director
NHS Trusts (England) Medical Director
CMO Urgent Messages – Recipients on public health link
CMO Urgent Messages – Non-NHS Recipients on public health link
Territorial CMO's in Ireland, Scotland and Wales
Clinical Commissioning Groups

NHS England, Public Health England and NHS Improvement will assist with cascading information to appropriate professional groups