

09 February 2006

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Dear Colleague

Influenza Season 2005/06 – Use of Oseltamivir

The most recent surveillance data available to us indicates that the overall rate of influenza reports has exceeded the threshold at which the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines on the use of antiviral drugs are triggered. Much of the increase is from cases of influenza type B in the 5-14 year old age group.

In line with the NICE guidance, the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention or treatment of influenza is now recommended.

A summary of the NICE guidance is given below for ease of reference.

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on antiviral drugs

1. Guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention of influenza
2. Guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the treatment of influenza
3. Further information

1. Guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention of influenza (prophylaxis)

New guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention of influenza was announced on the 24th September 2003. NICE recommends that when influenza A or B virus is circulating in the community, oseltamivir should be prescribed for the prevention of influenza to those aged 13 years or older who fulfil the following criteria:

People aged 13 years* or older who:

- belong to an 'at-risk' group, **and**
- have not had a flu jab this season, or who had one but too recently for it to have given good protection, or have had a flu jab but the vaccine does not match the virus circulating in the community, **and**
- have been in close contact with someone with flu-like symptoms, **and**
- can start taking oseltamivir within 48 hours of being in contact with the person with flu-like symptoms.

*Oseltamivir has recently been licensed for prophylactic use in children aged one year and above (31st January 2006). In the interim, until NICE formally reviews its recommendation, it would therefore be appropriate to use oseltamivir for prophylaxis in persons aged 1 year above according to the other conditions laid out by NICE as summarised above.

Prescribers should also note a concomitant change to the licensed duration of post-exposure prophylaxis in children and adults which is now ten (10) days (as opposed to the previous seven (7)).

Oseltamivir should **not** be used for the prevention of influenza in otherwise healthy people under 65 years of age, even if they have been in contact with people with flu-like symptoms.

Amantadine should **not** be used for the prevention of influenza in either group.

2. Guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the treatment of influenza

Updated guidance on the use of amantadine, oseltamivir and zanamivir for the treatment of influenza was issued in February 2003.

Within their respective licensed indications, zanamivir and oseltamivir are recommended for the treatment of influenza in adults who present with influenza-like illness (and oseltamivir for the treatment of at-risk children aged one year and over) and who can start treatment within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Amantadine is **not** recommended for the treatment of influenza.

3. Further information

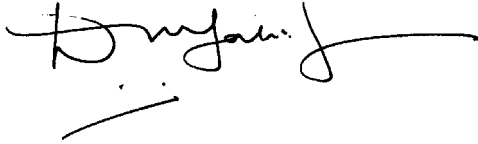
For more detailed information on the NICE guidance refer to the NICE web-site (<http://www.nice.org.uk>).

Influenza activity in England and Wales

Information on the GP consultation rates for influenza/influenza-like illness is collected by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP). Weekly updates on the consultation rates are published on the RCGP web-site

(<http://www.rcgp.org.uk/bru/tabular-data.asp>) weekly reports from the Health Protection Agency on current influenza activity can be found on the Health Protection Agency Website:
http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/influenza/seasonal/default.htm)

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D M Salisbury', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr D M SALISBURY CB FRCP FRCPC FFPHM
Director of Immunisation Policy, Monitoring and Surveillance

This document has been authorised by the Department of Health: **Gateway reference no: 6137**