

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride



Department of

**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

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URGENT COMMUNICATION

HSS(MD)46/2009

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

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Social Care Board/Trusts
Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency
Assistant Director Health Protection, Public Health Agency
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, Health & Social Care
Board/Trusts
Medical Directors, HSS Trusts
Nursing Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to all
Community Nurses*)
Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health & Social Care Board
(*for distribution to GP Out of Hours services*)
GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board
All General Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice
staff*)
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, Public
Health Agency
All Community Pharmacists
Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service
Regional Medicines Information Centre

Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD)46/2009
Date: 15 October 2009

Dear Colleagues

**RELENZA (ZANAMIVIR) INHALATION POWDER MUST NOT BE DISSOLVED FOR
ADMINISTRATION VIA NEBULISER**

The Commission on Human Medicines has advised that the antiviral drug Relenza (zanamivir) should not be reformulated from its intended inhalation powder into a solution to be nebulised. This advice follows an incident outside of the UK involving a patient who died when this unlicensed formulation caused a blockage in a mechanical ventilator.

Relenza (zanamivir) is available in the UK as a licensed powder for inhalation via a diskhaler device. Licensed use of Relenza via this device remains safe and this new advice does not affect the recommendations for use of the licensed formulation.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has now become aware that there may be limited unlicensed practice in the UK whereby the licensed inhalation powder formulation is removed from its approved packaging and dissolved for the purpose of nebulising zanamivir for inhalation.

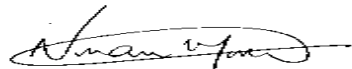
This practice has resulted in a fatality in a patient on mechanical ventilation who received zanamivir solution reformulated in this way and administered via nebuliser for three days. Death was attributed to obstruction of the ventilator. It is believed that the obstruction in the ventilator was caused by solubilised lactose (from the powder formulation) in the nebulising solution.

We would like to remind prescribers that Relenza inhalation powder should only be used as directed in the prescribing information by using the Diskhaler device provided with the product.

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Dr Norman Morrow
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

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