

From the Senior Medical Officer/Consultant Epidemiologist
Dr Lorraine Doherty



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD)1/2007
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HSS(MD)1/2007

To:

Directors of Public Health, HSS Boards (*for onward distribution to all General Practitioners*)
All General Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff, including practice nurses*)
All Community Pharmacists
Directors of Nursing, HSS Boards
Medical Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants*)
Nursing Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to Community Nurses*)
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, HSS Boards
Consultant Microbiologists, HSS Trusts
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, HSS Trusts/Boards/CSA
Regional Epidemiologists, CDSC(NI)
Chief Executives, HSS Trusts
GP Medical Advisers, HSS Boards
Dr Philip McClements, Prison Healthcare Services
Regional Procurement Pharmacists

URGENT COMMUNICATION

Dear Colleague

INCREASE IN CONSULTATION RATES FOR FLU-LIKE ILLNESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. I am writing to alert you to the fact that Influenza A virus is now circulating in the community in Northern Ireland. In addition general practitioner consultation rates for flu-like illness (FLI) have increased dramatically in the last few weeks (Figure 1, Annex A). Weekly updates on enhanced influenza surveillance are available on the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre(NI) website at www.cdscni.org.uk. Those wish to receive the weekly email bulletin should contact Dr Hilary Kennedy, CDSC(N) at hilary.kennedy@hpa.org.uk.
2. As influenza virus is now circulating in the community the guidance on the use of antivirals (Zanamivir and Oseltamivir) now applies (Circulars: HSS(MD)12/2003, HSS(MD)40/2003, HSS(MD)46/2003) and HSS(MD)42/2004)
3. There are no supply problems for influenza vaccine and, indeed, the Influenza Immunisation Programme should be nearing completion.
4. **Action Required by General Practitioners**

The following action is required:

Working for a Healthier People



- It is important that all primary care staff are now made aware that influenza virus is circulating in the community and there is an urgent need to ensure all relevant patients are immunised, and thus protected, as soon as possible.
- Residents of nursing and residential homes are particularly vulnerable, as attack rates for influenza A may be very high in such settings. GPs, together with HSS Trust staff, should ensure these patients have been immunised.
- As children have also been affected by the virus so far, GPs should identify children eligible for immunisation and offer them immunisation as soon as possible.
- GPs should advise patients with flu/fli of the need to stay at home during the course of their illness, in an effort to avoid onward community transmission.

5. **Action Required by HSS Trusts**

- It is important that Trusts implement their arrangements for immunisation of Trust staff as soon as possible and encourage high uptake rates. Failure to protect staff may lead to severe service difficulties.
- Acute Trusts should make plans for dealing with cases of influenza presenting to and in hospitals.

6. **Action Required by HSS Boards**

- Board Influenza Immunisation Co-ordinators should work with Primary Care and Trusts to ensure the Influenza Immunisation Programme is implemented as soon as possible.
- Board should ensure that arrangements for use of Oseltamivir in nursing/residential homes are up to date and confirmed.

7. **Treatment of Influenza**

Within their licensed recommendations, Zanamivir and Oseltamivir are recommended for the treatment of influenza in at risk adults who present with influenza-like illness and who can start treatment within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. Within its licensed recommendations, Oseltamivir is recommended for at risk children aged one year or older who present with influenza-like illness and start treatment within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Note: Zanamavir and Oseltamivir should not be used for the prevention or treatment of influenza in **healthy** adults under the age of 65 years.

Yours sincerely

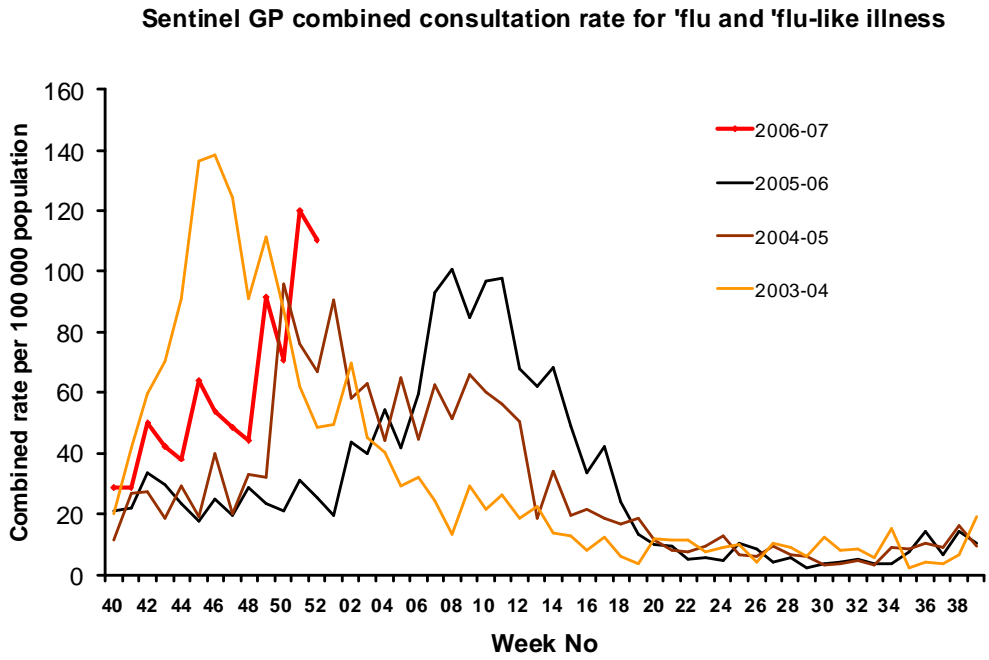


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cc: CMO
CNO
CPO
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Dr E Mitchell
Mr A Elliott
Ms C Jendoubi
Dr M McCarthy
Mr D Bingham
Ms J Moore
Philip Maguire
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Vaccine Wholesalers

This letter is available at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk and also on the DHSSPS Extranet which can be accessed directly at <http://extranet.dhsspsni.gov.uk> or by going through the HPSS Web at <http://www.n-i.nhs.uk> and clicking on DHSSPS.

Figure 1



Source: CDSC(NI)