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Principal Medical Officer



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

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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URGENT COMMUNICATION

HSS(MD)05/2006

To:

All General Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff, including practice nurses*)

All Community Pharmacists

Director of Public Health, 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

Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, HSS Trusts/Boards/CSA

Regional Epidemiologist, CDSC(NI)

Chief Executives, HSS Trusts

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Your Ref:

Our Ref: HSS(MD)05/2006

Date: 17 February 2006

Dear Colleague

**INCREASE IN CONSULTATION RATES FOR FLU-LIKE ILLNESS IN
NORTHERN IRELAND – INFLUENZA SEASON 2005-06**

From this week's (04/02/06-10/02/06) flu and flu-like illness (FLI) surveillance figures:

- clinical flu has increased according to sentinel GPs, a doubling from last week, 16 flu cases reported compared with 64 cases of FLI;
- combined rates of Flu/FLI are highest for 0-4 years and 5-14 years with the latter showing a marked increase from last week;
- total calls to out of hours centres have risen in the past week from 540 to 717/100,000 with the increases mainly in the 0-14 age group;
- over-the counter sales of paediatric cough, cold and antipyretic medicines (as a proportion of total sales) have increased; and
- influenza B and to a lesser extent influenza A is circulating

As influenza virus is now circulating in the community the guidance on the use of antivirals applies (Previous Circulars: HSS(MD)12/2003, HSS(MD)40/2003 and HSS(MD)46/2003 refer). A summary is given for ease of reference.

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.

Guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the prevention of influenza.

When influenza A or B is circulating in the community oseltamivir should be prescribed for the prevention of influenza to people aged 13 years* or older who fulfil the following criteria:

- belong to an “at risk” group, **and**
- are not effectively protected by flu vaccination this season, **and**
- have been in close contact with someone with influenza-like illness, **and**
- can start taking oseltamivir within 48 hours of being in contact with the person with flu-like illness.

*Oseltamivir has recently been licensed for prophylactic use in children aged one year and over (31 January 2006). In the interim until the guidance is formally reviewed, it would therefore be appropriate to use oseltamivir for prevention in children aged one year and over who fulfil the above criteria.

Prescribers should also note a concomitant change to the licensed duration of post-exposure prophylaxis which is now ten days (previously seven days).

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

Amantadine is **not** recommended for prevention of influenza.

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

Within their respective licensed indications, zanamivir and oseltamivir are recommended for the treatment of influenza in adults who present with flu-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 onset of symptoms.

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

Prescribing Oseltamivir

Oseltamivir should be prescribed in the usual way and supplied by community pharmacies.

For further information

For further information on oseltamivir and zanamivir see the Summary of Product characteristics and the British National Formulary. For more detailed information on the NICE guidance see <http://www.nice.org.uk>

For further information on influenza surveillance, weekly updates are available on the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre(NI) website at www.cdscni.org.uk. Those wish to receive a weekly email bulletin should contact Dr Hilary Kennedy, CDSC(N) at hilary.kennedy@hpa.org.uk.

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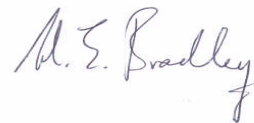
Yours sincerely



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