

Oseltamivir and amantadine for the prophylaxis of influenza

1 Guidance

This guidance has been prepared in the expectation that vaccination against influenza is undertaken in accordance with national guidelines. Vaccination is the most effective way of preventing illness from influenza, and the drugs described in this guidance are not a substitute for vaccination. This guidance does not cover the circumstances of a pandemic, impending pandemic, or a widespread epidemic of a new strain of influenza to which there is little or no community resistance.

This guidance pertains only to circumstances where it is known that either influenza A or influenza B is circulating in the community (see Section 1.7).

1.1 Oseltamivir is recommended for the post-exposure prophylaxis of influenza in at-risk people aged 13 years or older who are not effectively protected by vaccination and who have been exposed to someone with influenza-like illness (ILI) and are able to begin prophylaxis within 48 hours of exposure. People who are not effectively protected by vaccination include those who have not been vaccinated since the previous influenza season, or for whom:

- vaccination is contraindicated, or has yet to take effect

- vaccination has been carried out but the vaccine is not well matched to the strain of influenza virus circulating. (The Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly Government, acting on information from the Health Protection Agency, issue advice nationally each year on whether the vaccine and the circulating influenza virus are well matched.)

Exposure to ILI is defined as being in close contact with someone who lives in the same home environment as a person who has been suffering from symptoms of ILI.

1.2 At-risk people are defined, for the purpose of this guidance, as those who are in at least one of the following groups. People who:

- have chronic respiratory disease (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- have significant cardiovascular disease (excluding people with hypertension only)
- have chronic renal disease
- are immunocompromised
- have diabetes mellitus
- are aged 65 years or older.

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This guidance is written in the following context:

This guidance represents the view of the Institute which was arrived at after careful consideration of the available evidence. Health professionals are expected to take it fully into account when exercising their clinical judgement. This guidance does not, however, override the individual responsibility of health professionals to make appropriate decisions in the circumstances of the individual patient, in consultation with the patient and/or guardian or carer.

- 1.3 Oseltamivir is recommended for the post-exposure prophylaxis of influenza in at-risk people, aged 13 years and older and who can begin prophylaxis within 48 hours, whether or not they have been vaccinated, if they live in a residential care establishment where a resident or staff member has ILI. For the purposes of this guidance, a residential care establishment is defined as a place where the at-risk person resides in the long term in order to be provided with continuing care alongside a number of other individuals.
- 1.4 Oseltamivir is not recommended for post-exposure prophylaxis in healthy people up to age 65 years.
- 1.5 Oseltamivir is not recommended for the seasonal prophylaxis of influenza.
- 1.6 Amantadine is not recommended for either post-exposure or seasonal prophylaxis of influenza.
- 1.7 Community-based virological surveillance schemes should be used to determine when influenza virus is circulating in the community. Such schemes, including those organised by the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Health Protection Agency, should ensure that the onset of the circulation of influenza virus (A or B) within a defined area is identified as rapidly as possible. In Appendix D, definitions and numerical values of threshold levels for different categories of influenza activity are given.

Ordering information

Copies of this summary can be obtained from the NHS Response Line by telephoning 0870 1555 455 and quoting ref: N0293. For copies of the full guidance quote reference number N0292. Information for the public can be obtained by quoting reference number N0294 for the English version and N0295 for a version in English and Welsh.

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