

Important Information for Physicians: pH1N1 and Ontario's Antiviral Strategy

October 13, 2009

Highlights

- In response to pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will be distributing antivirals to community pharmacies to ensure equitable access to this medication for Ontarians.
- These provincially supplied antivirals are to be used for treatment of specific groups and, if used for this purpose, will be provided at no charge to the patient.
- Antiviral prescriptions that do not align with provincial recommendations should be filled only from commercial supplies (i.e., not from the provincial antiviral stockpile) and payment must be received from the patient.
- The ministry will be monitoring antivirals that are dispensed from the provincial supply to ensure appropriate use.

During the fall and winter 2009/10, healthcare providers can expect to see patients with seasonal influenza and/or pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza (pH1N1). Currently, evidence indicates that pH1N1 is similar to seasonal influenza in overall clinical features, morbidity and mortality. Most people who contract pH1N1 will have a typical course of influenza; however, those with risk factors may have more severe illness. Although pH1N1 has been a mild pandemic strain to date, influenza still remains a serious illness. As such, Ontario recommends vigilance, active prevention, and early treatment where clinically indicated.

Antiviral medications are a tool that can be used to achieve an important objective in Ontario's response to an influenza pandemic: to reduce morbidity and mortality. If used properly, antiviral medications can reduce the length of illness and complications resulting from influenza. As part of its pandemic preparedness program, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care maintains an antiviral stockpile in sufficient quantity to treat 25% of Ontario's population.

To ensure antiviral medications are available to those who need them during this flu season, the ministry is partnering with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association and Ontario Medical Association to implement a strategy to deploy components of the provincial stockpile to community pharmacies in the province of Ontario. Beginning the week of October 19th, the ministry will distribute oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) to all accredited pharmacies. Patients that meet the provincial criteria for treatment will be able to access the provincial Tamiflu by prescription.

It is important for physicians who prescribe antivirals to note that antivirals from the provincial supply will be provided free of charge to the patient as long as the prescription is in line with recommended use. Broad use of antivirals IS NOT recommended at this time, nor is the use of antivirals for pre-exposure prophylaxis. Prescriptions for use outside of provincial recommendations should be filled only from commercial supplies (i.e., not from the provincial



antiviral stockpile) and payment must be received from the patient (or an insurer if applicable). An audit process will be put in place to ensure that antivirals from the provincial supply are prescribed and dispensed appropriately.

Although more detailed guidance on the ministry's recommendations for antiviral use will be available shortly, in general antivirals are recommended for TREATMENT of the following patients with influenza-like illness (ILI): patients at risk of complications; patients with abnormal vital signs for their age and health status, and; patients with worsening clinical status.

Clinical guidelines on the management of ILI (which will include the recommendations for antiviral use) will be made available within the next week on the ministry's pH1N1 website at www.ontario.ca/flu; click on the link to "[Health Care Professionals](#)" on the left-hand menu and scroll down the page to view the latest guidance materials. Healthcare providers are also encouraged to register for the ministry's Important Health Notices in order to receive updates by visiting www.publichealthontario.ca; click on the link to "[Sign up for Important Health Notices](#)" on the right-hand menu.

Thank you for your cooperation.