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PRESS RELEASE

NICE reviews guidance on the treatment of 'flu

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (25 February) published final guidance on the use of oseltamivir, amantadine and zanamivir for the treatment of influenza. NICE guidance recommends oseltamivir and zanamivir for the treatment of influenza in adults and children if all the following circumstances apply:

- national surveillance schemes indicate that influenza virus A or B is circulating
- the person is in an 'at-risk' group
- the person presents with an influenza-like illness and can start treatment within 48 hours (or within 36 hours for zanamivir treatment in children) of the onset of symptoms.

Following the review and reappraisal of this guidance people with chronic neurological conditions and people with chronic liver disease are now considered 'at risk'. Also, zanamivir is now recommended as a treatment option for children between the ages of 5 and 12 years in 'at-risk' groups if influenza is circulating and they can start treatment within 36 hours of first symptoms.

During localised outbreaks of 'flu-like illness the reviewed guidance now also recommends oseltamivir and zanamivir be used to treat 'at-risk' people living in long-term residential or nursing homes who have been in contact with the illness. However, this should be done only if there is a high level of certainty that the cause of the localised outbreak is influenza. Amantadine is not recommended for the treatment of influenza.

Dr Gillian Leng, NICE Deputy Chief Executive said: “Flu is a highly contagious seasonal illness occurring mostly between December and March each year. Although the majority of people who get ‘flu get better within 1-2 weeks, some develop more serious problems such as chest infections. This guidance updates and expands the previous recommendations issued in 2003 and further increases the options available to health professionals when treating people who are considered to be ‘at risk’ when they develop ‘flu.

“Vaccination is the main way to prevent flu and the Department of Health currently recommends that people who are at risk of ‘flu infection or complications are vaccinated at the beginning of each winter. Oseltamivir and zanamivir can be used as an additional treatment option in at risk groups as they work in a way that stops the virus from multiplying in the body.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

About the guidance

1. The oseltamivir, amantadine and zanamivir for the treatment of influenza guidance is available at: <http://www.nice.org.uk/TA168>.
2. For the purpose of this guidance, people ‘at risk’ are defined as those who have one of more of the following:
 - chronic respiratory disease (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
 - chronic heart disease
 - chronic renal disease
 - chronic liver disease
 - chronic neurological conditions
 - diabetes mellitus.

People who are aged 65 years or older and people who might be immunosuppressed are also defined as ‘at-risk’ for the purpose of this guidance.

3. NICE have also published guidance on the use of oseltamivir, amantadine and zanamivir for the prophylaxis of influenza. Guidance is available at: <http://www.nice.org.uk/TA158>
4. This guidance has been prepared in the expectation that vaccination against influenza is undertaken in accordance with national guidelines. Vaccination has been established as the first-line intervention to prevent influenza and its complications, and the use of drugs described in this guidance should not in any way detract from efforts to ensure that all eligible people receive vaccination.
5. 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.

About NICE

6. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
7. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.