

## **Swine flu/H1N1 virus communication to Community Pharmacy from NHS Direct**

Wednesday, 6 May 2009

NHS Direct recognises that pharmacists are in a key position to support patients and the public with advice and information about how they can manage the symptoms of flu at home. In response to particular enquiries from the pharmacy profession and the public following the recent outbreak of Swine Flu and WHO Level 5 alert, the following communication is intended to clarify certain medicines and pharmacy issues.

### **General Guidance from NHS Direct**

To ensure we create a structure which makes best use of available resources, builds in the highest levels of resilience and manages capacity in the most effective way, we advise the following routes for patient and the public to access information regarding Swine Flu:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Visit the NHS Choices website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) for information and FAQs about Swine Flu. There is also an online flu symptom checker on both [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and the NHS Direct website ([www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)).
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Ring the national Swine Flu Information Line (0800 1 513 513). This provides pre-recorded information about Swine Flu.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Call the NHS Direct telephone service (0845 4647). Callers with flu-like symptoms, who have internet access, will be asked to try our online flu symptom checker first. If necessary, they will be able to request a call back from an advisor. Otherwise callers are asked to hold to speak to someone who can help.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Contact your GP over the phone.

### **Referral to Community Pharmacy**

NHS Direct refers callers and users of the online flu symptom checker to community pharmacy services to support patients managing their own flu symptoms. If the patient is confirmed to have H1N1 virus then they will be advised to telephone the pharmacy to ask for advice about particular "flu remedies" that could be purchased and/or send a healthy friend to speak to the pharmacist and/or purchase any OTC products. Patients are asked not to attend the pharmacy in person. NHS Direct advises patients that pharmacies are NOT providing antivirals. If it is confirmed that antivirals are required, this is tackled on an individual basis with the HPU currently arranging supply.

### **Visitors to the UK and temporary residents**

Visitors to the UK and UK residents visiting an area outside their own PCT or health board area requiring medical attention will be asked to register with a local GP on a temporary basis as per normal practice. This will be how any visitors will be assessed if they have concerns about flu symptoms and potentially need access to antivirals. It is preferable that patients/visitors do not go directly to a GP practice and current advice is for a GP to visit the patient where they are resident. The HPA website provides up to date information with advice for health professionals <http://www.hpa.org.uk/>.

### **Frequently asked questions (FAQs )**

The latest FAQs can be found on NHS Choices at <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx>. NHS Direct is working closely with NHS Choices to ensure that the FAQs are updated daily in light of new national guidance and common questions being asked by callers to NHS Direct. The FAQs provide information about the use of antivirals with coexisting conditions and in certain patient groups.

NHS Direct is working closely with the UK Medicines Information (UKMI) pharmacist network and National Poisons Information and Teratology Information Services to ensure staff have access to appropriate medicines information in response to callers' enquiries.

The Swine Flu information leaflet which is being distributed to all households also contains the most frequently asked questions. See [http://www.nhs.uk/news/2009/04April/Documents/Swine%20Flu%20Leaflet\\_Web%20Version.pdf](http://www.nhs.uk/news/2009/04April/Documents/Swine%20Flu%20Leaflet_Web%20Version.pdf)

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