

Information for prison staff about using antiviral medication to treat and prevent flu

Dear colleague,

You are being provided with this information leaflet because PHE has identified that there is an outbreak of seasonal flu in your prison. PHE is working with HMPPS and NHS England to protect vulnerable prisoners and staff who may be in clinical risk groups for complications of infection.

You should use this letter to inform your GP if you are in a clinical risk group. A list of clinical risk groups is provided at the end of this leaflet.

People in clinical risk groups are normally offered vaccination through their GP or occupational health services. But even if you have been vaccinated recently, it is still possible to get flu.

So PHE is recommending that prison staff who are in a clinical risk group and who work in prisoner-facing roles should be considered for post-exposure prophylaxis (treatment to prevent disease) with antiviral medication (AV PEP). The most commonly prescribed antiviral for this purpose is called oseltamivir (Tamiflu).

Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) is used for influenza virus A and B infections. It treats flu by preventing the viruses from spreading once they are inside your body. This reduces the symptoms of the flu infection or prevents you catching flu from other people.

You are being offered Tamiflu to prevent infection. If you develop symptoms of flu you will need to be assessed by your GP and might require a 'treatment dose' to be prescribed following clinical assessment. You should advise your GP in this case that you work in a prison with a confirmed outbreak of flu and have been on prophylaxis with Tamiflu.

Before taking oseltamivir

Some medicines are not suitable for people with particular conditions, and sometimes a medicine can only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you start taking oseltamivir it is important that the healthcare professional knows:

- if you are pregnant, trying for a baby or breast-feeding, although you can take oseltamivir if you are expecting or feeding a baby - it is important that your healthcare professional knows about this, so you are aware of the benefits and any risks of treatment
- if you have any problems with the way your kidneys work – this is because your dose may need adjusting
- if you are taking or using any other medicines – this includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, such as herbal and complementary medicines
- if you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine

How to take oseltamivir

Before you start the treatment, read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack; it will give you more information about oseltamivir and it will provide you with a full list of side-effects which you may experience from taking it.

You should take oseltamivir exactly as your healthcare professional tells you to.

Oseltamivir is a course of treatment, so it's important that you finish the whole course, even if you do not feel unwell.

If you are taking it because you have been in contact with someone with flu but do not have any symptoms yourself, then you will be prescribed 1 dose a day for at least 10 days. Start taking the capsules (or medicine) as soon as you collect it, and from then on, take 1 dose a day, preferably in the morning with breakfast.

Swallow oseltamivir capsules with a drink of water. You can take your doses either before or after meals, although taking the doses after food can often reduce the risk of feeling queasy.

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember (unless it is nearly time for your next dose, in which case leave out the missed dose). Do not take 2 doses together to make up for a forgotten dose.

How to store oseltamivir

You should store oseltamivir by:

- keeping all medicines out of the reach and sight of children
- storing in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light

High risk groups

The [national flu immunisation programme plan](#) (appendix A, page 9) lists the groups of people that should be included in the national flu immunisation programme.