Department of Health & Social Care

CAS Alert

Influenza Season 2018/19: Use of Antiviral Medicines in Primary Care

8 May 2019

Alert reference number: **CEM/CMO/2019/001**

The most recent surveillance data from Public Health England (PHE) indicates that circulation of influenza in the community has returned to baseline levels.

GPs and other prescribers working in primary care should no longer prescribe antiviral medicines, for the prophylaxis and treatment of influenza on an FP10 prescription form. Community pharmacists should no longer supply antiviral medicines in primary care, on presentation of an FP10 prescription form. This is in accordance with NICE guidance and Schedule 2 of the National Health Service General Medical Services Contracts (Prescription of drugs etc.) Regulations 2004, commonly known as the Grey List or Selected List Scheme (SLS).

This advice stands until we write again to re-commence prescribing and supply of antiviral medicines in primary care. **This does not impact on prescribing of antiviral medicines in hospitals. The arrangements for prescribing antivirals for localised community outbreaks of influenza during the 'out of season' period are set out below.**

NHS England wrote to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in June 2017 to clarify arrangements for prescribing antiviral medicines when there are localised community outbreaks of influenza during the out of season period, in line with NICE Technology Appraisals (TA158 and 168). This CAS alert reminds CCGs that responding to localised outbreaks falls outside GMS essential services and therefore CCGs will need to commission appropriate services to respond to such outbreaks, by assessing exposed persons for treatment or prophylaxis and completing a patient specific direction for this purpose. This response may be required both inside and outside normal working hours.

Professor Jonathan Van Tam
Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England

Dr Keith Ridge
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for England
Supporting NHS England, Department of Health and Social Care and Health Education England

Actions:

Who: Prescribers and Community Pharmacies

When: As soon as possible

1. Prescribers working in primary care and community pharmacists should no longer prescribe or supply antiviral medicines for the prophylaxis and treatment of influenza on an FP10 prescription form.

2. The arrangements for prescribing antiviral medicines out of the flu season, for localised community outbreaks, can be found at this link.

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Further information:
NICE guidance on the use of antiviral medicines can be accessed at:
- http://guidance.nice.org.uk/TA168 for treatment, and
- http://guidance.nice.org.uk/TA158 for prophylaxis.

Reports from PHE on influenza activity can be found on the GOV.UK website: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vaccine-uptake#seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake:-data-collection-guidance

Communication:
NHS England Area Teams have been asked to cascade this alert to: GPs, community pharmacists, hospital pharmacists, nurses and A&Es for action.

Clinical Commissioning Groups are asked to note actions to facilitate the NHS response to out-of-season outbreaks. Additional guidance for this can be found at:
- https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/localised-community-outbreaks-influenza-out-of-season-template-procedure.docx and
- https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/primary-care/primary-care-comm/resource-primary/influenza-out-of-season-faqs/

The alert has also been sent to:
NHS Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
NHS Trusts (England) - Medical Director
NHS Foundation Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
NHS Foundation Trusts (England) - Medical Director
CMO Urgent Messages – Recipients on public health link
CMO Urgent Messages – Non-NHS Recipients on public health link
UK CMOs in Ireland, Scotland and Wales
Clinical Commissioning Groups

NHS England, Public Health England and NHS Improvement will assist with cascading information to appropriate professional groups.