



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
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LAUREN A. SMITH, MD, MPH
INTERIM COMMISSIONER

Memorandum

To: Massachusetts Medical Society
Massachusetts Hospital Association
Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
Board of Registration in Medicine
Board of Registration in Nursing
Board of Registration in Pharmacy
Board of Registration of Physician Assistants
From: Dr. Lauren Smith, Interim Commissioner, Department of Public Health
Date: January 11, 2013
Re: Recommendation for Clinicians Prescribing Oseltamivir and Zanamivir

Massachusetts is now in peak flu season, as communities across the Commonwealth report increased amounts of flu-like illness, and hospitals, community health centers and health care providers see higher volumes of flu patients presenting for treatment in their facilities.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health continues to encourage flu immunizations for all Massachusetts residents and is working to support health care providers as they meet the high volume of patients requiring treatment. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated that antivirals may be appropriate when treating influenza.

Decisions about antiviral treatment can be supported by laboratory evidence, but laboratory testing is not a requirement when influenza is widespread. Not everyone with influenza needs to be treated with antivirals; if a clinician chooses to prescribe antivirals for a patient, it is expected that the patient would be appropriately evaluated, which typically includes an in-person assessment. Prescribing antivirals indiscriminately by phone is not advised. Additionally, antiviral treatment should be considered for previously vaccinated individuals if indicated, particularly for patients over the age of 65.

Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®) are the two FDA-approved antivirals used to reduce morbidity and mortality for individuals in need of treatment for influenza or to provide chemoprophylaxis to prevent illness from suspected exposure to influenza. And although those

antivirals are available at healthcare facilities and local pharmacies throughout the Commonwealth, there may be occasional (though temporary) shortages of oseltamivir and zanamivir at the pharmacy level in specific locations. Pediatric suspension of oseltamivir, however, is in critically short supply. To meet demand for pediatric patients, pharmacists must compound the antiviral medication as needed.

In light of these factors, it is the recommendation of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that practitioners who choose to prescribe oseltamivir and zanamivir do so electronically or by verbal order over the phone so that the patient's pharmacy has adequate time to prepare the drug for patient pick-up or to inform the clinician if that pharmacy is unable to fulfill the prescription so that the patient and his/her prescription may be sent to a pharmacy that is able to fulfill the prescription within a short period of time.

Sincerely, -

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lauren Smith', is written over the printed name.

Lauren Smith, MD, MPH
Interim Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Public Health