

Important Information for Pharmacies: pH1N1 and Ontario's Antiviral Strategy

October 13, 2009

During the fall and winter 2009/10, health service providers can expect to see patients with seasonal influenza and/or pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza (pH1N1). Currently, evidence indicates that pH1N1 is similar to seasonal influenza in overall clinical features, morbidity and mortality. Most people who contract pH1N1 will have a typical course of influenza; however, those with risk factors - such as diabetes, cardiac disease, and pregnancy - may be at higher risk for complications. Although pH1N1 has been a mild pandemic strain to date, influenza still remains a serious illness. As such, Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommends vigilance, active prevention, and early treatment where clinically indicated.

Antiviral medications are a tool that can be used to achieve an important objective in Ontario's response to an influenza pandemic: to reduce morbidity and mortality. If used properly, antiviral medications can reduce the length of illness and complications resulting from influenza. As part of its pandemic preparedness program, Ontario maintains an antiviral stockpile in sufficient quantity to treat 25 per cent of Ontario's population.

To ensure antiviral medications are available to those who need them this flu season, the Ontario Pharmacists' Association (OPA) has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to develop a strategy to deploy components of the provincial antiviral stockpile to pharmacies in the province of Ontario.

Beginning on or around the week of October 19, small quantities of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) will be auto-shipped to all accredited pharmacies. Due to the number of pharmacies in the province, it will take time for every pharmacy to receive their allotment and some may receive product in the weeks that follow. More detailed guidance specific to the pharmacy sector will be forthcoming.

Here's how it will work:

- Beginning on or about the week of October 19, Tamiflu capsules in adult dosage strength (75mg) and the paediatric dosage strength (30mg, 45mg) will be distributed from the provincial antiviral stockpile to community pharmacies. Quantities shipped will be pre-determined based on an estimate of the population and demand. Antivirals will be provided by the ministry to pharmacies at no charge. Note that the provincial stockpile does not include oral suspensions. For patients who cannot tolerate a capsule, pharmacists may compound the 75mg Tamiflu into an oral suspension in accordance with the manufacturer's directions.
- Once antivirals are received by your pharmacy, you should continue to store them as described under the specific product monographs. However, antivirals from the provincial supply should be stored **separately from any commercial supply**. Pharmacists are also expected to maintain proper storage and security of antivirals consistent with standards of practice of the Ontario College of Pharmacists.

- Antivirals from the provincial supply must be used in accordance with provincial guidelines. This is for **treatment** of specific groups. The provincial supply must not be used for pre-exposure prophylaxis, but may be used for post-exposure prophylaxis only in limited circumstances, such as outbreaks in long-term care homes. More information will follow with respect to provincial guidelines and this information will also be shared with health professionals who prescribe medications. A monitoring process will be put in place to ensure the provincial supply is being used according to provincial guidelines. In the event that the indication for the prescription is not clear and the prescriber is unavailable for verification, the pharmacist shall use his/her professional judgment when dispensing and shall document accordingly.
- Changes to the Health Network System (HNS) have been implemented to allow pharmacies to submit claims for antivirals dispensed from the provincial supply for any patient with a valid OHIP card (similar to the MedsCheck program). Product identification numbers (PINs) have been established for each formulation which will be available.
- Pharmacists like many other health professionals have been asked to play an important role in the management of pH1N1. OPA has worked with the ministry to establish a dispensing fee of \$7 for prescriptions filled from the provincial antiviral supply, which is consistent with other provincial models where the fee for payment of antiviral medication has been established at the provincial maximum. In addition, a compounding fee of \$2 for the extemporaneous preparation of oseltamivir oral suspension will be paid in circumstances where an oral suspension is required (i.e., for patients that cannot tolerate a capsule). Details on the claim procedure will be sent out from the ministry shortly. Software vendors will also be provided with the necessary details to ensure that pharmacy software systems are updated with the appropriate PINs.
- When treated according to the provincial guidelines, patients will receive their antiviral medication at no charge. Pharmacies shall not apply any fee differential – an amount between the \$7 fee and the pharmacy’s usual and customary fee – to the patient or any private insurer.
- The ministry will soon be issuing guidelines with additional details, as well as information on infection prevention and control in the pharmacy setting.
- OPA will also be releasing a Frequently Asked Questions document which will be accessible to all pharmacists and pharmacies in the near future.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should you have any questions, please contact OPA by email at info@opatoday.com or by calling toll-free 1-877-341-0788. Alternatively, you may contact the ministry by calling the Healthcare Provider Hotline toll-free at 1-866-212-2272.