



Guidelines for Healthcare Providers Regarding Stockpiling Antiviral Medication

Outbreaks of H5N1 avian influenza have occurred among poultry in eight countries in Southeast Asia since late 2003. H5N1 avian influenza has been reported among poultry in Turkey, Romania and Greece. Human infections of H5N1 influenza have been reported in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. To date no sustained or ongoing transmission of H5N1 avian influenza among humans has occurred.

There has been no H5N1 avian influenza in poultry or humans in the United States.

Recent media coverage regarding avian influenza has prompted many U.S. residents, concerned about the potential for an influenza pandemic, to request prescriptions for antiviral medication for private stockpiling purposes.

For the following reasons, Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES), the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS), the Harris County Hospital District (HCHD) and the Harris County Medical Society (HCMS) strongly discourage healthcare providers from prescribing influenza antiviral medication for private stockpiling purposes:

- There are limited supplies of antiviral medication in the U.S. Private stockpiling because of concerns about a future pandemic may mean that antiviral medication becomes unavailable for those who need it most during the current influenza season.
- Indiscriminate and inappropriate use of antiviral medication may promote the occurrence and spread of drug-resistant influenza strains.
- At this time, recommended priority use of antiviral medication is as follows:
 1. Treatment of persons who are at greatest risk for serious complications from influenza infection during the current influenza season (e.g. persons >65 years, young children and persons with certain chronic diseases).
 2. Prophylaxis in persons at high risk for serious complications from influenza infection who are exposed to influenza (e.g. household in which someone has been diagnosed with influenza or a hospital/nursing home with an outbreak of influenza) during the current influenza season.

HCPHES, HDHHS, HCHD and HCMS recommend that healthcare providers encourage their patients to practice the following simple, yet effective measures that can help stop the spread of germs such as the influenza virus:

- Get vaccinated against the flu
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, then throw the tissue away
- Clean your hands often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Stay home when you are sick and visit your healthcare provider when needed