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Antiviral Agents for Influenza - Availability and Summary of Recommendations

CURRENT ISSUE: The influenza season in California began earlier than usual. There have been reports of patients being unable to obtain prescriptions for influenza antivirals at their pharmacies. There have also been reports that some wholesalers are unable to fulfill orders of antivirals. While local shortages have been reported, there does not appear to be a statewide or nationwide antiviral shortage.

STRATEGIES: At this time, one manufacturer, Genentech, is reporting the ability to supply oseltamivir to wholesalers, and if necessary, promptly ship product directly to retail pharmacies and hospital pharmacies. Pharmacies should consider contacting their wholesaler's customer service desk to request drop shipments of antivirals from manufacturers if the wholesaler is unable to supply needed antiviral medication in a timely manner. While antiviral drugs work best when treatment is started within 2 days of onset of influenza, clinical benefit, particularly for severely-ill patients, has been observed even when treatment is initiated later.

PRIOR AUTHORIZATIONS: To provide prompt treatment, pharmacies are also requested to be mindful of prior authorization requirements and availability to allow dispensing of brand name formulations when generic formulations are not available.

PRIORITIZATION FOR USE OF ANTIVIRALS: To recap national and CDPH recommendations, as soon as possible treat with a neuraminidase inhibitor antiviral agent (e.g., oseltamivir, zanamivir) all patients with suspected or confirmed influenza who are:

- Hospitalized, or
- Severely ill, or
- At higher risk for complications, including
 - Young children, especially those younger than 2 years of age
 - Adults aged 65 years and older
 - Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities
 - Persons with chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, renal, hepatic, hematological, and metabolic disorders or neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions
 - People with immunosuppression, including those caused by medications or by HIV infection
 - Women who are pregnant or postpartum within 2 weeks after delivery
 - Extremely obese people with a body-mass index equal to or greater than 40
 - American Indians/Alaska Natives