Prescribing....

Antiviral drugs for 'flu

Oseltamivir and Zanamavir reduce replication of influenza A and B by inhibiting viral neuraminidase. They are most effective for the treatment of influenza when taken as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms. The BNF states that in otherwise healthy individuals they reduce the duration of symptoms by about one to one and a half days. However they are expensive and have some side effects.

They should not be considered a substitute for influenza vaccination, which remains the most clinical and cost-effective way of preventing illness from influenza.

These drugs are on the prescribing list for use only according to NICE guidance , as follows

- For the post-exposure prophylaxis of **high risk individuals** only who are **not already effectively protected.** At risk patients include those over 65 years or those who have one or more of the following : Chronic heart disease, chronic respiratory disease, chronic renal disease, chronic liver disease, chronic neurological disease , immunosuppression or diabetes mellitus **and**
- When started within a few hours, but no later than 48 hours in the case of oseltamivir or 36 hours in the case of zanamivir, of the onset of symptoms

During **local outbreaks,** when there is a high level of certainty that influenza is present they may be used for post-exposure prophylaxis or treatment in high risk groups such as those living in a nursing or residential home, regardless of their vaccination status. During a pandemic, an impeding pandemic or a widespread epidemic of a new strain to which there is little or no immunity in the community,this advice may change. But this will come from the Director of Public Health.

N.B. Please note that at the time of writing the latest weekly figures from the GP practices indicate that there were less than 20 cases of islanders consulting for 'flu like illnesses. Therefore unlike the UK, an outbreak has not been declared locally, so antivirals should only be offered to high risk patients who have not been vaccinated and who have been recently exposed.

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