

Gateway Ref No: 06880

Clinical Commissioning Groups

Primary Care Commissioning
Medical Directorate
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Dear Colleague,

RE: Localised community outbreaks of influenza in the out of season period

Localised community outbreaks of influenza have the potential to cause significant illness among exposed persons in at-risk groups. NICE Technology Appraisal Guidance (TAG) on the use of neuraminidase Inhibitors (such as oseltamivir and zanamivir, herein referred to as “antivirals”) recommends that these medicines are used in such situations.

Local Public Health England Centre Health Protection Teams (PHE Centre HPTs) routinely receive reports of such outbreaks, assess these and if indicated recommend the use of antivirals for exposed persons in at-risk groups. However outside of times when the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Pharmaceutical Officer has advised that seasonal influenza is circulating, general practitioners are unable to prescribe antivirals under the General Medical Services regulations and alternative local commissioning arrangements need to be made.

To fulfil the need to respond to localised outbreaks in this out-of-season period, NHS Clinical Commissioners (NHSCC) and its members have worked with NHS England to develop an approach whereby CCGs will commission appropriate primary care clinicians to respond to these outbreaks, by assessing exposed persons for the antiviral treatment or prophylaxis and completing a patient specific direction for this purpose. This may need to occur both during and outside of normal working hours, as for optimal benefit, antivirals must be supplied within a narrow time period from onset of symptoms, as per NICE TAG 158 and 168. There are no fixed dates for the out-of-season period since the duration of influenza activity varies from year to year, as monitored by national surveillance.

Additional detail on the needs of such a response, are provided in the template procedure.

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Please note that commissioners need to ensure antiviral supply either from local PHE antivirals stocks, which may be accessed out of season (where these are available) and on the basis of the CCG funding replacement stock. Alternatively, CCGs could make arrangements for a local pharmacy to hold antiviral stock outside of the main influenza season, in order to supply this quickly). CCGs may also wish to consider the scale at which the commissioned service will operate in the context of likely demand.

For your convenience, we also include a template procedure for you to adapt according to your local commissioning plans. We would be grateful if you would make contact with your PHE Centre HPT about local arrangements by 5th July 2017. If you already have existing locally commissioned arrangements for assessment, authorisation and supply of antivirals outside of the General Medical Services regulations, then these may continue.

If you have further questions on commissioning a local response, then please contact: england.primarycareops@nhs.net

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D Geddes', is positioned above the printed name.

Dr David Geddes
Head of Primary Care Commissioning
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