



衛生防護中心
Centre for Health Protection

Guide to doctors engaged in antiviral stockpiling for enterprises

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide information for doctors who assist enterprises in stockpiling antivirals as part of their strategies in business continuity planning for influenza pandemic.

This interim guide is published in the interests of disseminating a document for doctors' information against an increasing pandemic threat, while recognising that there are areas of the guide that still require further development. As such, the guide is a living document which will be revised in light of further updates and/ or recommendations of the World Health Organization.

Objectives

The main objectives of the Government's response to an influenza pandemic are:

- (a) To minimise the number of sick people and deaths; and
- (b) To reduce health, social and economic disruption to the community, in which business continuity has an important role.

Government's advice on business continuity

The Government has advised enterprises in Hong Kong to formulate their preparedness plans on maintaining business continuity and protection of their staff during influenza pandemic.



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The Centre for Health

Protection is a

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Department of Health for

disease prevention and

control

From the perspective of maintaining business continuity, enterprises that wish to maintain antivirals stockpile are advised to do so through their doctors, who can administer antivirals to staff infected during pandemic influenza. The “*Guide to enterprises for influenza pandemic preparedness: Antiviral stockpiling*” has been issued for enterprises (at CHP’s website: <http://www.chp.gov.hk/>).

Role of doctors in assisting enterprises for business continuity

Doctors can provide advice to enterprises on issues related to prevention of infectious diseases, infection control practices such as handwashing and disinfection for workplace, stockpiling of personal protective equipment and infection control equipment, use of antivirals, and all other relevant health advices. Relevant guidelines have already been uploaded onto the CHP’s website.

For enterprises that wish to stockpile antivirals as part of their business continuity plans, doctors can advise and assist them in doing so. During a flu pandemic, doctors can prescribe antivirals for treatment of infected patients in accordance with Government’s latest advice, which is provided via letters to doctors, public announcement and CHP’s website.

Antiviral stockpiling policy of the Government

The Government takes reference from recommendations of the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases (SCEZD) of CHP in terms of antiviral stockpiling and use, which are available at the CHP’s website. In the context of this guideline for business continuity, treatment for infected patients is the most important priority.

Guide on use of antiviral drugs for influenza

Taking into consideration antiviral drugs licensed in Hong Kong for influenza treatment and prophylaxis, SCEZD has reviewed and issued guidelines entitled “*General Guide to Doctors: Antiviral Use for Novel Influenza Treatment and Prophylaxis*”.

How to prepare/ arrange antiviral stockpiling for enterprises

As antivirals are prescription only drugs, doctors should only prescribe antivirals to enterprise employees after a proper medical consultation.

For enterprises that wish to establish an antiviral stockpile for business continuity, doctors can discuss with the enterprise the extent of coverage desired for its employees, which is dependent on the policy of

individual enterprise. From a business continuity perspective, priority is given to employees that are required to sustain core operations of the enterprise or are at risk of infections at work, whose absence from work would lead to suspension of business. Taking into consideration the treatment regime (as per the “*General Guide to Doctors: Antiviral Use for Novel Influenza Treatment and Prophylaxis*”) and the number of employees to be covered, doctors can then estimate the amount of antivirals required. The estimation should focus on the amount of antivirals required for treatment of infected staff.

Depending on the amount of antivirals to be stockpiled, a suitable place for storage needs to be identified, for example, by making arrangements with pharmacies/pharmaceutical companies manufacturing these antivirals or partnering with other doctors. Guidelines on storage may be obtained from pharmaceutical companies.

Since the supply of antivirals may not be available immediately, doctors need to work out an advance delivery schedule with the pharmaceutical companies. The time limitations should be conveyed clearly to enterprises.

Doctors should also convey clearly to enterprises on conditions under which the stockpile would be mobilized so as to avoid any misunderstanding on antiviral use.

Doctors are also recommended to make contingent arrangements, e.g. via professional partnerships or assigning doctor deputies, so that when they became ill and unable to render service, the professional partners or deputies could take up antiviral prescription and management of sick staff for enterprises.

Conditions when antivirals are to be used for enterprise employees

During influenza pandemic, when efficient human-to-human transmission is occurring, or when there are widespread outbreaks in the community, the sheer number of patients may be so large that they create enormous stresses on the public healthcare system and the antivirals kept by the Government.

At that stage, the Government may issue advice to private doctors to mobilize their antiviral stockpile for enterprise continuity. This will facilitate timely treatment to infected staff, thus reducing disease severity, facilitating recovery and may shorten the sick leave period of staff.

Doctors have to monitor any side effects arising from the treatment and advise termination of drugs treatment if needed.

For cases with deteriorating clinical conditions despite antiviral

treatment, they should be referred to hospitals for management.

Doctors should also recommend enterprises to take heed of Government's latest advice from public announcement and CHP's website.

Professional reminders

Doctors should also remind enterprises on the following regarding antivirals:

- (a) Antivirals drugs should not be regarded as the only preparedness measure for business continuity. Infection control measures, such as good handwashing, wearing surgical masks when having symptoms are more effective in prevention of transmission of influenza at the workplace.
- (b) In initial phase of influenza pandemic, any suspected or confirmed cases of pandemic influenza will still be referred to and treated in the public hospitals.
- (c) The effectiveness and side effects of antivirals
- (d) The contraindications of antivirals, and as such not every key staff identified may be eligible to take the drugs.
- (e) An explicit corporate infection control policy, good infection control practices, with sufficient personal protective equipments are of paramount importance for protecting staff during influenza pandemic.

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