

Antiviral drugs NOT the only preparedness measure

In the event of a pandemic, it is recommended that enterprises should take heed of the Government's latest advice from public announcements and the CHP website.

Stockpiling of antiviral drugs should not be regarded as the only preparedness measure for business continuity. Enterprises should also practise infection control measures, such as proper hand hygiene, wearing surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, which are more effective in prevention of transmission of influenza in the workplace.

Preventive measures for staff

The key issues on staff preventive measures have been incorporated in 'What Employers/Enterprises Should Know about Influenza Preparedness' and 'Health Advice on Prevention of Avian Influenza in Workplace'. Both are available at the CHP website.

In essence, an explicit corporate infection control policy, good infection control practices, with sufficient personal protective equipment are of paramount importance for protecting staff during influenza pandemic.

Useful links

1. Department of Health: <http://www.dh.gov.hk>
2. Centre for Health Protection: <http://www.chp.gov.hk>
3. Hospital Authority: <http://www.ha.org.hk>
4. World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int>
5. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov>

Centre for Health Protection

Department of Health

Revised in April 2018

Guide to influenza pandemic preparedness

How do enterprises prepare for influenza pandemic?

Influenza Pandemic



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Guide to influenza pandemic preparedness

How do enterprises prepare for influenza pandemic?

Purpose

The threat of an influenza pandemic still exists. The purpose of this guide is to provide information for enterprises to prepare for an influenza pandemic including the issue of establishing an antiviral stockpile as part of their strategy in business continuity planning for influenza pandemic.

Objectives

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

- To minimise the number of sick people and deaths
- To reduce health, social and economic disruption to the community

Business continuity planning

Each enterprise should formulate its preparedness plan to maintain operations/services and ensure maximum protection of staff and business.

Those enterprises which consider stockpiling antiviral drugs in their business continuity plans are recommended to consult their doctors who are responsible to prescribe these antiviral drugs to staff during influenza pandemic when necessary.

Antiviral drugs

There are different types of antiviral drugs licensed in Hong Kong for treatment of influenza. Based on evidence from seasonal influenza, treatment with antiviral drugs may reduce severity and duration of illness. However, the effectiveness of antiviral drugs will not be known precisely until the pandemic virus is circulating.

Different antiviral drugs have different side effects. For example, people who have previous hypersensitivity reactions to such antiviral drugs should not take them. Enterprises that wish to stockpile these drugs should consult doctors for appropriate use and side effects. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has issued 'General guide to doctors: antiviral use for novel influenza treatment and prophylaxis' (http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/20080131_SCEZD.pdf) to all doctors in Hong Kong.

Antiviral stockpiling policy of the Government

The Government takes reference from recommendations of the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases of the CHP in terms of antiviral stockpiling and use (http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/summary_of_recommendations_on_antiviral_stockpiling_for_influenza_pandemics.pdf). Antivirals are stockpiled for both treatment and post-exposure prophylaxis purpose in anticipation of the next influenza pandemic.

Stockpiling of antiviral drugs by enterprises

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 it creates enormous stress on the public healthcare system and antiviral stockpile kept by the Government.

Enterprises that wish to build up an antiviral stockpile for treatment of patients to maintain core operation and business when the pandemic is under way should do so through their doctors. Enterprises and their doctors need to work out the amount of antiviral drugs to be stockpiled, taking into account enterprise policies, staff required for core operations or at risk of infection, and other factors. The purpose is to provide reliable supplies of antiviral drugs to their staff, so that treatment can start in time. This facilitates recovery and may shorten the sick leave period of staff. It is important to note that antiviral drugs must be prescribed and kept by a doctor.

Involvement of doctor

It is advisable that an enterprise can ensure access to a doctor for assistance and advice for pandemic preparedness. Smaller businesses that wish to have antiviral stockpile may consider contracting out the service to a local doctor.

In business continuity planning, the doctor should be consulted on issues related to prevention of infectious diseases and infection control measures, such as proper personal and environmental hygiene; cleansing and disinfection for workplace; stockpiling of personal protective equipment; use of antiviral drugs and other relevant health advice.