

Guide to enterprises for influenza pandemic preparedness Antiviral stockpiling

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide information for those enterprises that wish to establish an antiviral stockpile 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 enterprises' 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:

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

Business continuity planning

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

Those enterprises which consider stockpiling antivirals in their business continuity plans are recommended to do so through their doctors, who can administer these antivirals to staff infected during pandemic influenza.

Antiviral drugs

Based on evidence from seasonal flu, treatment with antiviral drugs is expected to shorten the duration of illness and reduce complications and hospitalisations. However, the effectiveness of antivirals will not be known precisely until the pandemic virus is circulating. There are different classes of antiviral drugs licensed in Hong Kong specific for influenza treatment.

Different antivirals have different side effects. For example, people who have

previous hypersensitivity reactions to such antivirals should not take the drug. Enterprises who wish to stockpile antivirals should consult doctors for appropriate use and side effects. The Centre of Health Protection (CHP) has issued “*General guide to doctors: antiviral use for novel influenza treatment and prophylaxis*” 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 (SCEZD) of CHP in terms of antiviral stockpiling and use (at CHP’s website: <http://www.chp.gov.hk/>). In the context of this guideline, treatment for infected patients is the most important priority.

Stockpiling of antivirals 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 stresses on the public healthcare system and antiviral stockpile kept by the Government.

Enterprises who wish to build up an antiviral stockpile to facilitate the delivery of services when the pandemic is under way should do so **through their doctors**. Enterprises and doctors need to work out the amount of antivirals 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 antivirals to their infected 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 antivirals have to be prescribed and kept by a doctor.

Involvement of enterprise 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, 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 advice. The Government will provide guidance to the doctors on these issues.

Use of antivirals for employees

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

Stockpiling of antiviral 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.

Infection control measures for staff protection

The key issues on staff protection 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's website.

In essence, 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.

Useful links

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

Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health
May 2006