

## Otherwise healthy people do not need antivirals for H1N1, says UN health agency



21 August 2009 – Otherwise healthy people infected with the **H1N1** virus do not need to be treated with antiviral drugs, the United Nations World Health Organization (**WHO**) said today as it issued new **guidelines** in the use of the drugs against the pandemic.

Worldwide, most infected patients continue to display typical influenza symptoms and fully recover within a week without any form of medical treatment.

According to the new guidelines, formed by consensus by a global group of experts, healthy patients with uncomplicated illnesses do not need to take antivirals.

The guidelines emphasize using drugs such as oseltamivir and zanamivir, to which the pandemic virus is susceptible, to prevent severe illness and deaths, reduce the need for hospitalization, and shorten hospital stays.

When properly prescribed, oseltamivir is found to significantly curb the risk of pneumonia, a leading cause of death for both pandemic and seasonal influenza.

WHO recommends treatment with the drug as soon as possible among people who are severely or whose conditions begin to deteriorate. Where oseltamivir is not available, zanamivir can be given.

The virus is currently resistant to a second class of antivirals, known as M2 inhibitors.

Pregnant women are among the groups considered to be at increased risk, and WHO recommends that they receive antiviral treatment as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms.

The agency cautioned that the presence of underlying medical conditions is not a reliable indicator of all or even most cases of severe illness, with some 40 per cent of severe cases now occurring in previously healthy children and adults under the age of 50.

For children, the guidelines call for prompt treatment for children – including those under five years of age – with severe or worsening illnesses, as well as those at risk of more severe or complicated illness.

Otherwise healthy children over five years, WHO said, do not need antiviral treatment unless their conditions persist or worsen.

If someone with confirmed or suspected H1N1 infections shows symptoms including shortness of breath, chest pain and high fever lasting beyond three days, they should seek immediate medical attention.

Among children, warning signs include fast or difficult breathing, lack of alertness, difficulty in waking up and little or no desire to play.

Earlier this week, WHO, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**), the UN Children's Fund and other groups issued a "Call to Action" to support governments and communities in their bid to minimize the virus' impact.

**News Tracker: past stories on this issue**

UN health agency advises South-East Asian nations in fight against A(H1N1) virus