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Information Exchange System

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Warning on purchase of antivirals without a prescription, including via the Internet

WHO is advising the public not to purchase medicines to fight or prevent influenza A (H1N1), unless prescribed by a health care practitioner in line with national pandemic influenza preparedness plans.

Testing has shown that the currently circulating influenza A (H1N1) virus is sensitive to antivirals

[http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/swineflu_faq_antivirals/en/index.html] such as oseltamivir or zanamivir, which are authorized in a number of WHO Member States. The widespread, inappropriate use of these medicines could increase the risk of the virus developing resistance to them. Antivirals should therefore only be purchased with a prescription from a health care practitioner who has examined the patient.

Products sold outside the authorized national medicine supply chains should not be purchased.

In addition to the need for a prescription, caution should be exercised in buying antivirals over the Internet¹. There are legitimate Internet pharmacies operating under some jurisdictions. However, there may be considerable risks associated with buying drugs online, and this is always the case in countries where internet sales are not strictly regulated. Unlicensed and illegal Internet pharmacies take orders and payments with no assurance of the medicines being delivered, and those customers who do receive medicines have no guarantee of the safety, quality or effectiveness of the medicines, thereby seriously putting their health at risk. Taking illegal, unapproved or counterfeit (fake) medicines, could result in death, failure of treatment or serious side effects, because such medicines may not contain any active ingredient, or may contain the incorrect amount of active ingredient or active ingredients not listed on the label or dangerous additives.

To learn more about other important measures to protect against the spread of influenza A (H1N1), please consult the WHO web page which is updated regularly (<http://www.who.int/en/>).

¹ For further information please consult: "Medical products and the Internet", WHO, Geneva 1999 WHO/EDM/QSM/99.4 , <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/d/Js2277e/>