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Travellers need immediate access to Tamiflu when entering areas at risk from avian or seasonal influenza**J.R. Smith*, S.C. Wood***F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd, Switzerland*

The protection of global travelers against influenza is an increasing concern in travel medicine.

Since January 2006, the range of H5N1 viruses has greatly extended from being mostly confined to East and South East Asia to outbreaks spreading into Europe, the Middle East and Africa meaning that travelers will be increasingly likely to enter into an affected region. Travelers need reassurance that they can be protected from developing this life-threatening disease if exposed.

Seasonal influenza is responsible for significant morbidity and loss of productivity in corporate employees and travelers each year. While vaccines are normally the mainstay of preventing influenza infection, movement between the northern and southern hemispheres will not only take travelers into an influenza season and potential epidemic situation, but also expose them to virus strains not circulating in their countries, and potentially not covered in their local vaccines.

Tamiflu[®] (oseltamivir) is an anti-viral agent that is effective against all strains of influenza A and B, including H5N1 and other avian influenza viruses (Govorkova et al., 2001; Yen et al. 2005) Tamiflu is indicated for both the treatment (75 mg twice-daily for 5 days) and prevention

(75 mg once-daily for 10–42 days) of influenza in children \geq 1 year, adolescents and adults.

Speed of access to Tamiflu is of utmost importance. In seasonal influenza, the earlier Tamiflu is administered the greater the clinical benefit (Nicholson et al. 2000; Aoki et al. 2003). In animal models, treatment of H5N1-infected mice and ferrets with Tamiflu increases survival, and survival increases with earlier treatment (Govorkova et al., 2001, 2007). This translates into clinical observations in humans infected with H5N1, where evidence suggests that the faster a patient can be treated with Tamiflu, the better their chance of recovery (Oner AFO et al., 2006).

Travellers need immediate access to Tamiflu to ensure that they can take the medication within hours of being exposed to avian or seasonal influenza. Tamiflu should be part of travel medicine recommendations for people travelling to regions where seasonal influenza is epidemic or where avian influenza is circulating.

KEYWORDS

Influenza; Tamiflu; Antiviral; Protection

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