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What is more dangerous to your health: flu or Tamiflu[®] (oseltamivir)?

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2 February 2007

In many countries such as Japan oseltamivir (Tamiflu[®]) is promoted for common flu. Oseltamivir has been stockpiled by more than 300 corporations, some governments in developed countries, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), in case a new-type flu pandemic occurs.

There is some confusion between what is known of oseltamivir in treatment or prevention of common flu, and what is known of its effects in treatment or prevention of complications during a hypothetical new-type flu pandemic.

Most often flu is a mild and self-limited infection, and there is no evidence that oseltamivir reduces the frequency of serious flu complications, whether in healthy people or vulnerable populations. At most oseltamivir reduces flu symptoms by one day, which is not relevant.

There is no evidence that oseltamivir prevents flu complications in close contacts of flu infected patients during a seasonal outbreak.

So far avian flu can hardly be seen as a global public health problem. There is no evidence that oseltamivir is effective at preventing or curing complications during a new-type flu pandemic.

Oseltamivir commonly induces nausea and vomiting, and there is increasing evidence that oseltamivir may cause serious side effects, such as abnormal behaviour and sudden death from

respiratory depression. The FDA warned about the possibility of neuropsychiatric side effects of oseltamivir following consistent reports, mostly from Japan, where oseltamivir is widely used

(www.fda.gov/medwatch/safety/2006/safety06.htm#tamiflu).

Therefore ISDB calls on caregivers and the public to avoid using oseltamivir

in common flu, due to increasing evidence that oseltamivir may cause more harm than good. Oseltamivir does not provide value for money in common flu.

ISDB calls on WHO to stop stockpiling oseltamivir, considering the absence of solid evidence that the drug could be helpful during a new-type flu pandemic. Stockpiling of oseltamivir by WHO is also seen to contribute to the hype surrounding the unwarranted use of oseltamivir ("An iatrogenic pandemic of panic" BMJ 2006; 332; 786-788).