

Indiana Medicaid Therapeutics Committee

Therapeutic Class Review Summary

Therapeutic class:

Antiviral (Influenza) Agents

Overview:

Influenza occurs at epidemic rates each year and is the leading cause of respiratory illness in the United States with the majority of complications, hospitalizations, and deaths occurring in the elderly. Vaccination has been the cornerstone for prophylaxis and is recommended annually for immunocompromised persons and those with comorbidities such as chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, and chronic metabolic diseases.¹⁷ Illness due to influenza in the general population results in increased time off from work and loss of productivity. Recognition of the clinical and economic impact of influenza worldwide has resulted in increased research for alternative methods of prevention and treatment.

Pharmacological interventions have been developed to specifically target viral proteins that facilitate influenza infection of the host. The two classes of antiviral influenza agents are ion channel inhibitors and neuraminidase inhibitors. The ion channel inhibitors, amantadine and rimantadine, inhibit M2 protein which allows hydrogen ions to enter into the cell resulting in the acidification needed for viral replication. The neuraminidase inhibitors, oseltamivir and zanamivir, inhibit viral neuraminidase necessary for aggregation of viral particles.¹⁶ Amantadine was first introduced into the market in 1966 for the treatment of influenza A. Ten years later, amantadine also gained FDA approval for chemoprophylaxis of influenza. Rimantadine, pharmacologically related to amantadine, was marketed in 1993. Although trials have shown clinical efficacy of ion channel inhibitors, *Monto et al* reports that the use of these agents have been limited due to the concern for resistance and the need to ensure that the virus being treated is caused by influenza A.²¹ *Hayden et al* further explains that oral rimantadine may be preferable to amantadine for treating influenza A virus infections due to its therapeutic efficacy combined with its lower potential for central nervous system (CNS) side effects.²⁰ Recently, resistance to influenza A viruses has been reported in the United States with the use of the M2 ion channel inhibitors and their use is currently not recommended. The neuraminidase inhibitors, oseltamivir and zanamivir, both introduced in 1999, are FDA approved to treat influenza A and B. All antiviral influenza agents are indicated for prophylaxis of influenza. Caution should be exercised when using zanamivir because it has been associated with brochospasms in patients with a history of airway disease.⁴ Clinical studies, such as the IMPACT trial, have shown improved effectiveness in the treatment of influenza when oseltamivir and zanamivir were initiated \leq 48 hours after the onset of symptoms.^{1-8,18} Specific dosage recommendations and precautions must be considered when using ion channel and neuraminidase inhibitors in children, elderly and patients with renal and hepatic impairment.

Vaccinations are the most cost effective therapy in the elderly and other patients with comorbidities. According to the *Advisor Committee on Immunization Practices*, the cost-utility of vaccinations improved with increasing age and among those with chronic medical conditions.²³ Chemoprophylaxis with influenza agents may benefit persons at high risk who are vaccinated after influenza activity has begun and persons who provide care to those at high risk for influenza complications.²³ However, further study is needed to provide rationale for use of these agents in immunocompromised patients. The antiviral influenza agents may be considered in this patient population.^{1,4,9,23}

Generic Name	Trade Name	Dosage Form	Manufacturer	Generic
Amantadine	Symmetrel®	100 mg capsules, tablets 50mg/5ml syrup	Endo, various	Y
Oseltamivir	Tamiflu™	75 mg capsules (blister package of 10) 12mg/ml powder for oral suspension	Hoffman-LaRoche	N
Rimantadine	Flumadine®	100 mg tablets 50 mg/5ml syrup	Forest, various	Y
Zanamivir	Relenza®	Powder for oral inhaler (rotadisk®) 5mg/blister	GlaxoWellcome	N

SUMMARY:

Amantadine is the least expensive antiviral influenza drug available today, while novel neuraminidase inhibitors are the most expensive agents. Amantadine, although proven clinically efficacious, is associated with notable CNS side effects.¹¹ Rimantadine is associated with fewer side effects; however, like amantadine, it is only active against influenza A virus. Resistance to influenza A viruses has been reported in the United States with the use of the M2 ion channel inhibitors and their use is currently not recommended. The neuraminidase inhibitors are active against both influenza A and B virus and are proven to be efficacious with less severe gastrointestinal side effects such as nausea and vomiting.

Currently, comparative clinical trials of the efficacy and safety of ion channel inhibitors and neuraminidase inhibitors are limited. Selection of an antiviral agent to prevent or treat influenza should be based on each drug's spectrum of activity, side effects and ease of dosage administration.¹⁶ Consider having one ion channel inhibitor and one neuraminidase inhibitor on formulary. Ion channel inhibitors can be selected for use when the prevalence of influenza B is low in the community or when rapid tests indicate influenza A is present. Antiviral agents should not be substituted for the suggested annual influenza vaccine.^{1-8, 23} These agents may be used as adjunctive therapy for the prevention and/or treatment of influenza.