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STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND CONSUMERS FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA AND ANTIVIRALS USE

Kingsford, Michigan – October 18, 2005. The Michigan Department of Community Health issued guidelines today strongly discouraging healthcare providers from prescribing and the public from requesting antivirals for private stockpiling purposes, based on concern about the possibility of an influenza pandemic due to the current avian influenza situation in southeast Asia.

- H5N1 is a highly pathogenic strain of influenza currently circulating in birds in Asia and Eastern Europe.
- Since December 2003, over 116 people have become ill and at least 60 have died from H5N1 infection. No sustained or ongoing transmission of H5N1 avian influenza among humans has occurred.
- There has been no H5N1 influenza in birds or humans in the Western Hemisphere at this time.
- Studies done in laboratories suggest that the prescription medicines approved for human flu viruses should work in preventing bird flu infection in humans. However, flu viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so these medications may not always work. There has been one case reported of a strain of avian influenza that has demonstrated some resistance to oseltamivir (Tamiflu®).
- The indiscriminate and inappropriate use of Tamiflu may promote the development and spread of resistance to this important drug.
- There have been reports of numerous requests for antivirals. Individual stockpiling of oseltamivir at this time may impact the ability for public health to adequately respond to a pandemic, should one occur.
- Government stockpiles of oseltamivir are limited and there is a worldwide shortage of oseltamivir, with limited production capacity at the present time.
- There are limited supplies of oseltamivir in the U.S. and hoarding of this drug becomes a concern because it will be unavailable for those who need it most during the current regular flu season.
- There is no indication for prescribing oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) for avian influenza prophylaxis at this time in the U.S.
- The highest priority for use of oseltamivir is for treatment of people during the upcoming regular flu season who are at highest risk for serious complications from influenza.
- Influenza vaccination is preferable to treatment with antivirals for prevention.

The state health department, and the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department recommend consumers take the following actions:

- Get a flu shot when it becomes available
- Stay home when you are sick with cough, fever or illness
- Use a tissue and cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Wash hands after coughing or touching respiratory secretions
- Stay at least 3 feet away from persons who are coughing or sneezing
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with hands that may be contaminated with the virus
- Stop smoking

For further information, visit the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department web site at www.didhd.org or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web sites at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm> or <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

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