



Swine flu information sheet for patients taking hydrocortisone

Who is this advice for?

This advice has been prepared for patients that need regular replacement hydrocortisone therapy, as a result of pituitary or adrenal (Addison's disease) failure.

Why is this advice necessary?

The intention of hydrocortisone replacement therapy is to replicate the levels of cortisol in healthy people. However, people on long term hydrocortisone therapy may be at slightly increased risk of contracting swine flu. If you contract swine flu, your dose of hydrocortisone needs to be adjusted in line with the usual sick day rules (described below) but it is better still, if possible, to avoid infection. This sheet provides advice on reducing your risk of infection and on what to do if you become infected.

Be prepared

- Make sure your GP is aware that you are vulnerable.
- It is preferable for your GP to provide you with a six month repeat prescription of hydrocortisone to reduce the pressure on pharmacists and GPs.
- It is essential that you have a two month reserve supply of hydrocortisone tablets at home at all times in case you become ill.
- You should aim to have two vials of emergency hydrocortisone for intramuscular injection. Make sure these are in date and that both you and your family/partner know how to administer it.

Avoiding swine flu

- When out and about, use alcohol rubs or wipes. At home, use detergents to kill the virus.
- Avoid contact with those possibly infected.
- A surgical mask may reduce contamination if it's impossible to distance yourself from an infected person.
- When it becomes available, discuss the possibility of flu vaccination with your GP.

What to do if you suspect you have swine flu

- Swine flu is suspected if you have a temperature of more than 38°C and two or more of the following symptoms: widespread muscle and joint aches, runny or blocked nose, sore throat, headache, cough, watery diarrhoea and vomiting.
- Do not visit your GP for a correct diagnosis - you may pass the infection on.
- Go to A&E or call an ambulance if you are seriously unwell with diarrhoea, vomiting, dehydration or drowsiness.



- For advice or to obtain antiviral medication, phone your GP, NHS Direct (0845 4647), or the swine flu information line (0800 1 513 513).

Should you take anti-viral drugs?

- If your symptoms suggest that you have swine flu, then antiviral drugs (such as Tamiflu or Relenza) may be recommended.
- A 'Flu Voucher' will be issued by your GP or the local 'Flu centre', which needs to be picked up by your flu friend (someone who will fetch and carry for you while you are ill).
- Most cases of swine flu are mild and pass after a week. Antiviral drugs shorten the duration and severity of the illness when taken early.
- Tamiflu may cause nausea and vomiting and for this reason some people prefer to take Relenza, which has slightly milder side effects, or they may indeed decline antiviral treatment.

What should you do about your hydrocortisone tablets?

The 'sick day' rules apply as usual, so people with swine flu are advised to:

- Double your normal dose of hydrocortisone if your fever is greater than 37.5°C.
- Continue with this increased dose until you are better and then wean down the dose over a few days.
- If you vomit, take 20mg of hydrocortisone immediately and sip rehydration/electrolyte fluids (i.e. Dioralyte).
- If you vomit twice, use your emergency hydrocortisone injection and call a doctor, saying "Addison's Emergency".
- Take an emergency hydrocortisone injection with you if you go to A&E in case there is a delay. Also take your Blue Steroid card for information.

Prepared by the Society for Endocrinology Clinical Committee in association with the Addison's Disease Self Help Group and the Pituitary Foundation

Further information

About swine flu

National Pandemic Flu Service

Tel: 0800 1 513 513

Web: <https://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/>

Residents of England and Wales

Tel: 0845 46 47

Web: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk> (England)

Web: <http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk> (Wales)

Residents of Scotland

Tel: 0845 4 24 24 24

Web: <http://www.nhs24.com>

About hydrocortisone and swine flu

Pituitary Foundation

Tel 0845 450 0375 (Mon-Fri 09:00-17:00)

Email: helpline@pituitary.org.uk

Web: <http://www.pituitary.org.uk>

Addison's Disease Self Help Group

Web: <http://www.addisons.org.uk>



Residents of Northern Ireland

Tel: 0800 0514 142

Web: <http://www.dhsspshi.gov.uk>