

Antivirals 'little or no effect' on flu complications in children

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The study shows that antivirals shorten the duration of flu in children by up to a day and a half but that they have little or no effect on some complications.

(PhysOrg.com) -- The antivirals oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) are unlikely to prevent complications in children who have swine flu, according to research published by the *BMJ* today.

While the study shows that antivirals shorten the duration of flu in children by up to a day and a half, it also shows that they have little or no effect on asthma flare-ups, increased [ear infections](#) or the likelihood of children needing antibiotics. The antiviral [Tamiflu](#) is also linked to an increased risk of vomiting.

The authors, led by Dr Matthew Thompson from the University of Oxford, add that the study reveals the effectiveness of using antivirals to contain the spread of flu. They conclude that 13 people need to be

treated to prevent one additional case; therefore antivirals reduce transmission by 8 per cent.

During seasonal flu epidemics children are at high risk, with over 4 in 10 (40 per cent) preschool children getting the virus and 3 in 10 (30 per cent) school age children doing so. School age children are also the main source of spread of flu into households, say the authors.

The main strategy to control flu is vaccination but coverage can be low and often there is not enough time to produce and distribute vaccines in response to emerging strains. Therefore current control strategies include using antiviral medications to prevent the virus spreading as well as treating infected individuals.

Thompson and his colleagues say the last review of this strategy was carried out in 2005 and a more up to date assessment of the benefits and harms of this treatment is now required.

So they carried out a review of four trials on the treatment of flu in 1,766 children (1,243 with confirmed flu, 55 to 69 per cent with type A, the same strain as [swine flu](#)) and three trials involving the use of antiviral to limit the spread of flu.

The authors conclude that it is difficult to know the extent to which their findings can be generalised to [children](#) in the current swine [flu](#) pandemic but, based on current evidence, the effects of [antivirals](#) on reducing the course of illness or preventing complications might be limited.

‘While morbidity and mortality in the current pandemic remain low, a more conservative strategy might be considered prudent, given the limited data, side effects such as vomiting, and the potential for developing resistant strains of influenza,’ they say.

Provided by Oxford University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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