

## **Information Update from Department of Health**

### **Swine Flu – Line on BMJ study - under 12s and Tamiflu**

#### **Background:**

Children should not be given the anti-viral drug Tamiflu because its harms outweigh any benefits, researchers said today.

They called on the Department of Health to have an urgent rethink of its current policy in the swine flu pandemic.

Their study found that Tamiflu caused vomiting in some children, which can lead to dehydration and complications.

And the drug had little or no effect on asthma flare-ups, ear infections or the likelihood of a youngster needing antibiotics.

#### **A Department of Health spokesperson said:**

"The BMJ review is based on seasonal flu and not swine flu. As the authors note, the extent to which the findings can be applied to the current pandemic is questionable – after all, we already know that swine flu behaves differently to seasonal flu, and past pandemics have hit younger people hardest.

"Whilst there is doubt about how swine flu affects children, we believe a safety-first approach of offering antivirals to everyone remains a sensible and responsible way forward. However, we will keep this policy under review as we learn more about the virus and its effects.

"The BMJ research is correct to say that many people with swine flu only get mild symptoms, and they may find bed rest and over-the-counter flu remedies work for them.

But for those who experience severe symptoms, the best scientific advice tells us that Tamiflu should still be taken as soon as possible - and to suggest otherwise is potentially dangerous. If people are in any doubt about whether to take Tamiflu, they should contact their GP."

#### **Sir Liam Donaldson, the Government's Chief Medical Advisor said:**

"This is a good research team and their report is welcome. However, the study is limited in its scope, tentative in its conclusions and not directly comparable to the current situation.

It reviewed a very small number of past clinical trials on seasonal 'flu - not the current H1N1 pandemic 'flu strain.

"Antivirals are the only available weapon, albeit imperfect, against the virus until a vaccine is developed and ready for use. Like all drugs, they can have side effects in some people."