

Suggested Substitute or Alternative Drug Therapy for the Flu Treatment Kit

By Grattan Woodson, MD, FACP

In *The Bird Flu Manual*¹ I have recommended a list of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs in the Flu Treatment Kit section that will be useful for the treatment of pandemic influenza and its complications. This text also provides the reader with guidance for when and how to use these drugs for treatment of flu. The drugs listed in the pamphlet, *Good Home Influenza Treatment*, include only non-prescription OTC drugs as it is written for use by those without access to a doctor willing to assist them obtain a stockpile of prescription drugs for use during the pandemic.² The pamphlet includes specific guidelines for use of these OTC drugs in treatment of pandemic influenza. The drugs specified in these publications are commonly available in pharmacies, grocery stores, and over the Internet. They are inexpensive generic drugs except for one, the antiviral Tamiflu. Generic drugs are a good value and many of these older drugs remain as effective as some costly branded products with the same US FDA approved indications.

The US FDA has greatly expanded the number of drugs available OTC that are effective but do not require a doctor's prescription. Some of these products will be very important to have on hand for flu treatment. Those interested in preparing for the coming pandemic should purchase an appropriate quantity of these OTC drugs for their stockpile. Recommended quantities

are provided in the Flu Treatment Kit sections of the above publications.

If your physician is willing to help you, now is the time to purchase a stockpile of prescription drugs you will need to have on hand during the pandemic. This includes the drugs that will be useful for management of flu and also those that you take everyday for treatment of the chronic medical disorders you may have.

The value of using drugs properly

It is important that people use these drugs properly in order to get the intended benefit and to avoid unnecessary side effects. Advice on when and how to use the drugs listed in the Flu Treatment Kit are included in the above referenced publications.

This article discusses possible substitutes for the drugs specified in the above two publications. There are several simple reasons why I recommended these particular drugs. The first is they are the ones that I have prescribed for treatment of flu for many years and over this time have found them to be very effective and safe for the uses recommended. These drugs are versatile in that they provide a broad range of benefits and uses beyond their US FDA approvals. Having fewer drugs to deal with simplifies the task of learning how and when to use them safely. All the specified drugs except Tamiflu are generic which helps to keep the cost of stockpiling down. Lastly, the drugs are widely available throughout the world.

In the table below, you will find the drug specified in the Flu Treatment Kit listed in the first column, the recommended

indication in the second, and the trade or brand name of the product in the third. Possible substitutes, if any, are listed to the right in the adjacent column. In some cases the suggested substitute is actually an alternative treatment rather than a true substitute. Some alternatives have similar mechanisms of action and effects. If you need to use a substitute for any of the drugs specified in *The Bird Flu Manual* and you intend to compound them for use as an oral solution, you will need to review the drug's Product Circular to find what doses are recommended for use in children and adults and adjust the formula according. If your doctor is prescribing these drugs, he or she will provide you with this guidance.

Possible OTC Drug Substitutes for OTC drugs listed in the Flu Treatment Kit				
Index FTK OTC Drug	FTK Indication	Drug Trade Name	OTC Substitute	OTC alternative
Acetaminophen	Pain and fever	Tylenol®		Ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin
Ibuprofen	Pain and fever	Motrin®	Naproxen, aspirin	Acetaminophen
Diphenhydramine	Nose and ear congestion	Benadryl®	Loratadine, clemastine fumarate, Doxylamine Succinate, dexbrompheniramine, chlorpheniramine maleate	Saline nasal sprays, Cromolyn Sodium (NasalChrom®), Phenylephrine Hydrochloride (Neo Synephrine®), Pseudoephedrine, Oxymetazoline Hydrochloride (Afrin®), Propylhexedrine (Benzedrex inhaler®)
DM contain cough syrup ¹	Cough suppressant	Robitussin DM®	Many other private-label store brands	Guaifenesin 600 mg (Expectorant)
Loperamide 2mg	Diarrhea	Imodium AD®		Bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol®, Kaopectate®)
Meclizine	Nausea	Antivert®	Dimenhydrinate (Dramamine®), Diphenhydramine, Cyclizine Hydrochloride (Marezine®)	Dextrose + fructose + phosphoric acid combinations (Emertrol®)

¹ DM is the abbreviation for dextromethorphan, an effective non-narcotic cough suppressant.

Possible OTC or Prescription Drug Substitutes for Prescription drugs listed in the Flu Treatment Kit				
Index FTK Rx Drug	FTK Indication	Drug Trade Name	Rx Substitute	OTC Substitute
Oseltamivir	Influenza Antiviral	Tamiflu®	Relenza®	none
Promethazine	Nausea, vomiting, nasal congestion, abdominal cramps	Phenergan®	Chlorpromazine	For all: Dimenhydrinate (Dramamine®), Diphenhydramine, Cyclizine Hydrochloride (Marezine®) and meclizine (but much less effective than promethazine)
Hydrocodone	Pain, cough suppressant, diarrhea and as bowel antispasmodic	Lortab®, Vicodan®	For all: Codeine For diarrhea and bowel spasm: Lomotil®, paregoric	For pain: Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, aspirin, and naproxen For cough: DM containing cough syrup; For diarrhea and as bowel spasm: loperamide, Bismuth subsalicylate
Diazepam	Muscle spasm, anxiety, insomnia	Valium®	Xanax®, Ativan®, Librium® for all	For anxiety: valerian For insomnia: Acetaminophen plus diphenhydramine, valerian
Azithromycin	Bacterial infections complicating influenza	Zithromax®	Erythromycin, Ketek®, ciprofloxin for all	None
Probenecid	Oseltamivir dose multiplier	Benamid®	None	None

¹ Woodson, Grattan. The Bird Flu Manual, Booksurge Publishing, Charleston, SC, September 2006.

² Woodson, Grattan. Good Home Influenza Treatment, available as a free download from www.BirdFluManual.com in the Home Influenza Treatment folder of the Resource section.