

Doubts cast on influenza medication

11th April, 2014



Medical experts are questioning why so much money was spent developing and then stocking up on medications for influenza. The tablet Tamiflu and nasal spray Relenza are commonly prescribed by doctors to treat the flu. Governments have heavily stockpiled the drugs as a

precaution in the event of an influenza epidemic. However, new research casts doubt on their effectiveness and on the claims made by their manufacturers. The Cochrane Collaboration, a non-profit healthcare research network, and the British Medical Journal published a report based on clinical trials of the drugs. The study questions whether governments should be spending money on the drugs.

The research says Tamiflu does what manufacturers claim in that it shortens the symptoms of influenza by half a day. However, it says there is insufficient evidence to support claims that the drug reduces the likelihood of hospitalization or serious complications. The researchers also found Tamiflu increased the risk of nausea and vomiting by up to five per cent, and could cause headaches and depression. Tamiflu's makers said the research excluded "real-world data". The research team said Relenza worked little better than gargling with salt water or taking over-the-counter pain relievers. The maker, GlaxoSmithKline, said: "When used appropriately, in the right patient, it can reduce the duration of flu symptoms."

Sources: USA Today / BBC / CBC

Writing

If a drug doesn't make someone better, the patient should get a refund. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

medical / experts / developing / flu / epidemic / manufacturers / healthcare / drugs / symptoms / evidence / likelihood / hospitalization / complications / gargling / symptom

True / False

- There are questions about why governments spent money on drugs. T / F
- Governments bought lots of the drugs in case of a bird flu epidemic. T / F
- New research suggests manufacturers claims are wrong. T / F
- The British Influenza Journal published the report. T / F
- Researchers found that Tamiflu reduced flu symptoms by half a day. T / F
- Researchers agreed that Tamiflu helped reduce hospitalizations. T / F
- A drug maker said the researchers did not look at the proper data. T / F
- The researchers said gargling with salt water worked better. T / F

Synonym Match

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. experts | a. time span |
| 2. stocking up on | b. specialists |
| 3. precaution | c. tests |
| 4. effectiveness | d. lessens |
| 5. trials | e. safeguard |
| 6. insufficient | f. left out |
| 7. reduces | g. amassing |
| 8. likelihood | h. usefulness |
| 9. excluded | i. possibility |
| 10. duration | j. not enough |

Discussion – Student A

- Have you ever taken medicine that didn't work?
- Is it worth taking a medicine that ends your symptoms half a day early?
- Does the body become less able to fight disease if we always take medicine?
- What good does gargling do?
- Should governments ask the drug companies for a refund?
- Do you think over-the-counter medicine works well?
- Is medicine too expensive?
- What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. experts are questioning | a. evidence |
| 2. stocking up | b. as a precaution |
| 3. commonly prescribed | c. with salt water |
| 4. stockpiled the drugs | d. on medications |
| 5. a report based on clinical | e. manufacturers claim |
| 6. Tamiflu does what | f. and vomiting |
| 7. insufficient | g. why |
| 8. Tamiflu increased the risk of nausea | h. counter pain relievers |
| 9. worked little better than gargling | i. by doctors |
| 10. over-the- | j. trials |

Discussion – Student B

- How often are you ill?
- What do you do as a precaution against illness?
- What are the symptoms of flu?
- Have you ever had the flu? What was it like?
- What do you think about what you read?
- Do governments do enough research before buying things?
- Do you believe the claims made by manufacturers about their drugs?
- What's the best thing to do when you have a cold?

Spelling

- Medical xprstee
- stocking up on instcioaemd for influenza
- commonly rdcbpspeire by doctors
- in the event of an influenza ipcmeide
- casts doubt on their iceneesefsvft
- based on ianlcllic trials
- it shortens the msostmyp of influenza
- there is insufficient nviceeed to support claims
- serious smptnclcoaioi
- increased the risk of asneua and vomiting
- taking over-the-counter pain seerelvri
- When used rploiatpypare ...

Answers – Synonym Match

1. b	2. g	3. e	4. h	5. c
6. j	7. d	8. i	9. f	10. a

Role Play

Role A – Sleep

You think sleep is the best remedy for influenza. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their cures. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): garlic, honey and lemon or drugs.

Role B – Garlic

You think garlic is the best remedy for influenza. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their cures. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): sleep, honey and lemon or drugs.

Role C – Honey and lemon

You think a honey and lemon mix is the best remedy for influenza. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their cures. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): garlic, sleep or drugs.

Role D – Drugs

You think a pill from the doctor is the best remedy for influenza. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their cures. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): garlic, honey and lemon or sleep.

Speaking – Effective

Rank these with your partner. Put the most effective for treating colds at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| • sleep | • injection |
| • hot-water bottle | • cold tablets |
| • honey and lemon | • garlic |
| • keeping warm | • mother's secret remedy |

Answers – True False

a	T	b	F	c	T	d	F	e	T	f	F	g	T	h	F
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.