

November 25, 2005

Dear Patient:

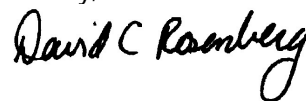
I hope the ending of hurricane season and the start of "flu season" finds all of you doing well. This letter was initiated by the concerns many of my patients have expressed over the abundant information in the media regarding the avian or bird flu. Flu, short for influenza, is a generic term for a viral illness that can be quite compromising, much more so than the "common cold" which is also caused by a virus. In our most recent newsletter I discussed influenza so I will refer to that for those specifics. I would like to address the avian flu in this letter.

The avian flu is a seasonal illness (similar to the common human variation of influenza) that strikes the bird population this time of year. What makes this strain of avian flu more concerning is its high mortality rate among infected birds. Humans coming into contact with these infected birds have been shown on rare occasions to contract this illness. Presently, the World Health Organization (WHO) is quite active in surveillance of world trends and has stated that only isolated incidences of human infections have occurred in Southeast Asia. Although vaccination would be the best form of prevention, one is still being worked on for humans, and will take months or years to be available. Some prototypes are available at this time but their effectiveness and safety is not certain. Amantadine and Rimantadine, the antiviral medications prescribed 5-10 years ago, are not effective but the newer antivirals Relenza (zanamivir) and Tamiflu (oseltamivir) are effective. Unfortunately, these viruses are able to change genetically and become resistant to treatments. That is how they "survive". The indiscriminant use of antiviral medications will only promote mutation of the virus resulting in resistant strains of influenza.

I have received many inquiries regarding prescribing Tamiflu or Relenza to patients so that they might obtain this medication for fear of it not being available should a true pandemic occur. After thinking about this very difficult and complicated issue, by conferring with local experts and doing my own research of the medical literature, I have decided to follow the guidelines set up by the WHO, the CDC and other medical authorities. Prescribing these medications in advance would do much more harm than good. There have recently been reports of strains of avian flu resistant to Tamiflu. Should these medications actually be necessary in the future they must be both effective and available. Since these antiviral medications are in limited supply at this time it is critical that appropriate amounts be available for those who require it for acute illnesses. These medications are used to treat common influenza which is a yearly threat to all people. Despite reports of some of my colleagues prescribing these medications preventatively, I do not agree with this and encourage you to discuss concerns you may have directly with me, via email, phone, or in person.

There are presently many researchers throughout the world who are working on this potential medical problem. Our government is promoting increased production of these antiviral medications and plans for their appropriate distribution should it become necessary. I encourage you to understand that viral illnesses have been around longer than we have and will continue to be. With common prevention methods and appropriate information we are better able to make rational healthcare decisions. More information on the bird flu can be found at www.cdc.gov/flu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David C Rosenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David C. Rosenberg, MD