

June, 2009

June, edition of M.D. Pharmacy's monthly newsletter. Articles regarding your medications, their safety, and the politics behind the price you pay for them. Please share this with your neighbors.

H1N1 (Swine) Flu

Swine Flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu but human infections can and do happen, and can then be spread rapidly from person to person. The most current advice from the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services includes: Clean hands often with soap and water, or if water is unavailable with alcohol-based hand cleaners. Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, clean hands afterward, and discard tissue into a wastebasket. If tissue is not available cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve. Keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth to prevent the virus from entering the body. Those with flu should stay home from work or school, and any other activities that may involve contact with others. There may be benefits to wearing a surgical mask when around others. It is important to note that this year's flu vaccine does NOT protect against H1N1, but next year's formulation will. The main difference between H1N1 and seasonal flu is usually the severity of symptoms, although fortunately, the strain which is emerging as the culprit in this country is milder than that found in Mexico and other countries. H1N1 infection is characterized by a high fever, a cough producing thick mucus, runny nose, muscle pain, shaking chills and dehydration. Disinfectant bleach solutions may be used on items like doorknobs, telephones, switches and other surfaces that are commonly touched around the house. Doctors should NOT prescribe antibiotics, as they are useless against viral infections, and can lead to bacterial resistance. H1N1 flu may be communicable beginning as much as a day before symptoms appear. (American Red Cross)

Medicare Seeks to Avert Paying for "Mistakes" in Prescription Billing

If you've been overcharged by Medicare's (Part D) prescription drug program administered by private insurance companies, don't count on getting your money back any time soon, if at all. And don't count on Medicare to help you, either. The elderly health care program appears to have washed its hands of any responsibility for insurance companies "mistakes" that have cost subscribers and taxpayers several billion dollars, and seems to have ended up vastly enriching the private insurance companies. In a response to MO Senator Claire McCaskill's query, the inspector general for the Department of Health and Human Services reported that 80 percent of the insurance companies participating in the Medicare Part D program owed Medicare about \$4.4 Billion for 2006 overcharges alone. Medicare, which supposedly supervises the \$60 Billion program, and contracts

with private insurance companies to provide drug coverage, is far behind in auditing those companies, and estimates that a full 25% of all bid audits for 2006 and 2007 had "mistakes" that led to higher profits for the insurance companies, and higher cost for subscribers, according to the inspector general. (McClatchy Information Services, Washington Bureau)

Dieters Should Stop "Hydroxycut" Use Now

Government health officials warned dieters and body builders recently to immediately stop using "Hydroxycut", a widely sold supplement linked to cases of serious liver damage and at least one death. The product, which has been available for sale in grocery stores and national chain pharmacies as well as so-called "health-food" stores, has been used by people trying to shed pounds and by body builders to sharpen their muscles. It is regarded as a "supplement" and therefore is not regulated by the government to prove safety and efficacy as are medicinal products by the FDA. (Associated Press)

Neither "Hydroxycut" nor any similar products have ever been offered for sale by M.D. Pharmacy.

FDA Approves More Drugs, but Still Misses Deadlines

The number of new drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration has ticked upward in 2008, even as regulators failed to meet review deadlines on more than a dozen drugs. The FDA will approve at least 21 first-of-a-kind drugs this year, up from 18 in 2007. In recent years Big Pharma has criticized the FDA for approving fewer new drugs. Many critics suggest the agency has become too cautious in response to deadly side effects of drugs such as Vioxx, discovered well after FDA approval, and quickly pulled from the market in 2004. (ed. note- "too cautious??").

The pharmacists and staff at M.D. Pharmacy, your neighborhood pharmacy.