

From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride



HSS(MD) 19/2026

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/HSC
Trusts/NIAS
Chief Operating Officer, SPPG
GP Medical Advisers, SPPG
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for
onward distribution to practice staff and
Community Pharmacies*)
OOH Medical Managers (*for onward distribution to
staff*)

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 90 520653
Email: cmooffice@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD) 19/2026
Date: 7 May 2026

Dear Colleague

EXPANDING ACCESS TO INFLUENZA ANTIVIRAL MEDICINES YEAR ROUND

Summary

The Department has put in place amendments to *The Health and Personal Social Services (General Medical Services Contracts) (Prescription of Drugs Etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004* (“the 2004 Regulations”), to allow Health and Social Care (HSC) prescribing and dispensing of Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and Zanamivir (Relenza®) by standard HSC prescription processes outside the flu season.

These amendments will improve efficiency of current processes by removing the current restrictions on influenza antiviral prescribing set out in Schedule 2 of the 2004 Regulations, including restrictions on prescribing outside the period where the Department has notified GPs that influenza is circulating in the community. These amendments came into force on 1 May 2026.

Background

The 2004 Regulations set out rules governing what drugs, medicines, and other substances may be prescribed under General Medical Services (GMS) contracts in Northern Ireland (NI). Schedule 2 to the 2004 Regulations lists restricted drugs and substances that GPs can prescribe on a HSC prescription, but only under specific conditions. The regulations define the circumstances, which often relate to specific clinical indication; public health alerts (e.g. flu outbreaks) and patient risk categories (e.g. immunocompromised, elderly, those with diabetes or heart disease, and

individuals who are pregnant). This ensures that certain high-cost or specialist medications are only used when clinically justified.

Antivirals – oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®) – are recommended for treatment of those at highest risk of severe disease following a confirmatory test for flu, or within flu season for those with influenza-like infection symptoms. They are also recommended for prophylaxis in specific settings such as care homes where confirmed cases of flu have occurred.

Outside of the flu season, which is defined by a notification from the Department based on Public Health Agency (PHA) advice on epidemic thresholds, prescribing of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®) was previously restricted due to their inclusion within Schedule 2 of the 2004 Regulations. While outbreaks of flu outside of the flu season are relatively infrequent, the consequences can still be serious for vulnerable people, and the previous restrictions had the potential to lead to delays in accessing necessary treatment and resulting health impacts.

The Health and Personal Social Services (General Medical Services Contracts) (Prescription of Drugs Etc) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026, removes the flu antiviral restrictions in Schedule 2 to the 2004 Regulations to enable Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and Zanamivir (Relenza®) to be prescribed and dispensed via standard HSC prescription processes outside of the flu season in NI. This reflects improvements in respiratory infection testing and availability of the antivirals, meaning the original rationales for the restrictions no longer apply, as well as lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic. Removing the current restrictions will improve the efficiency of the process to prescribe antivirals out of flu season, reducing delays and improving health outcomes.

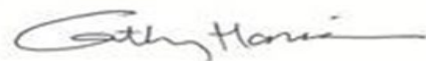
Further information

Further information can be accessed on the [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) website with the following link: [The Health and Personal Social Services \(General Medical Services Contracts\) \(Prescription of Drugs Etc\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2026](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukni/2026/1/1/2026-01-01/1)

Yours sincerely



Prof Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

