



Clinical Update

For Telephone Triage Nurses

July 2009

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Acetaminophen

Dear Nursing Colleague:

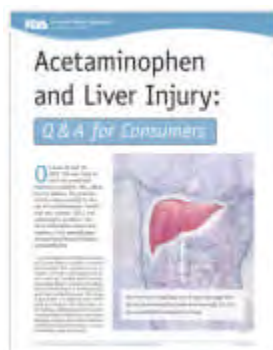
Acetaminophen is one of the most commonly used medications in the United States and Canada. It is an effective medication for treating both fever and pain. It is available over-the-counter (e.g., Tylenol) and is also present in prescription pain medications (e.g., Vicodin and Percocet).

It is known that taking acetaminophen in amounts higher than recommended daily dosages (4 grams per day in adults) can lead to liver damage. The type of liver damage ranges from mild abnormalities in liver enzymes to acute liver failure.

Some individuals may be more sensitive to liver injury than others. Individuals with existing liver disease, greater than 3 drinks of alcohol per day, or age greater than 65 years may be more susceptible to liver disease at standard doses of acetaminophen.

Since acetaminophen is present in so many over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications, patients can unwittingly take higher than acceptable dosages. Telephone triage nurses can help patients avoid this accidental over-dosage by:

- ♦ Warning patients that combination OTC cold medications often have acetaminophen and recommending that these combination medications should be avoided.
- ♦ Reminding patients that prescription pain medications can contain acetaminophen. For example, a prescription bottle that says "APAP and..." contains acetaminophen.
- ♦ Recommending that the standard dosage of acetaminophen for a healthy adult is 650 mg PO every 4-6 hours as needed. The current maximum total daily dosage of 4,000 mg is a maximum not a recommended dosage. A reasonable total daily dosage is 2,600 mg (4 x 650 mg).



Health Information for Consumers

The FDA has a nicely written document available online at <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm168830.htm>

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Acetaminophen (Continued)

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) -- June 29-30th 2009 Meeting

Because of the concerns outlined on the first page of this *Clinical Update*, an advisory panel made recommendations to the FDA on June 29-30th that included:

1. Reducing the total maximum daily dosage from 4,000 mg to 2,600 mg.
2. Reducing the maximum pill strength from 500 mg to 325 mg.

We are awaiting the FDA's decision on this matter. The Schmitt-Thompson Telephone Triage guidelines will be modified to reflect any rulings that the FDA makes.

Regards,

David Thompson, MD

Novel Influenza A H1N1 Pandemic Declared

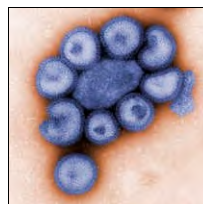
On June 11, 2009 the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the worldwide pandemic alert to Phase 6 in response to the ongoing spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus. A Phase 6 designation indicates that a global pandemic is underway.



The following are reliable sources of information on H1N1 (Swine Flu):

- ◆ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States (CDC); Swine Flu Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>
- ◆ CDC FluView Surveillance Report of U.S. Human H1N1 cases: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>
- ◆ ACEP (www.acep.org) has developed a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document to help emergency physicians deal with the influx of patients who either have, or believe they have, swine-origin influenza A (H1N1) virus.

At the end of May 2009, we released a third and "final" version of the **Swine Flu Exposure** telephone triage guideline to software vendors and all of our medical call center partners. This guideline may need to be modified further as we learn more about this illness or if the virus changes.



Schmitt-Thompson
Clinical Content

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