

Fears rise over side effects of Tamiflu as cases of adverse reactions double in a week

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Fears over the side effects of Tamiflu grew last night as it was revealed that the number of suspected adverse reactions had doubled in one week.

Figures from the drugs safety watchdog, seen by the Daily Mail, show there have been 293 reports of side effects from the powerful antiviral since the beginning of April, when the swine flu outbreak began.

This compares to the 150 reported the week before - a jump of 143 in only seven days. The cases include heart and eye problems, and psychiatric disorders.



More than half of children who take Tamiflu suffer from nausea, nightmares and other reactions, a study found

The figures come only a few days after a study showed that more than half of children who take Tamiflu suffer from nausea, nightmares and other reactions.

The massive rise coincides with the launch of the National Pandemic Flu Service, which allows Britons for the first time to get Tamiflu over the phone or internet without the intervention of a GP.

In the first three days of its operation - between 24 and 26 July - no fewer than 150,000 Tamiflu packs were handed out.

A growing number of doctors have raised concerns over whether the drug is being handed out too readily, putting many at needless risk of side effects when in the majority of instances, swine flu is a mild illness.

The 293 cases, reported by doctors to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, are only of suspected adverse reactions. However, those that turn out not to have been caused by Tamiflu are likely to be only a fraction of the total.

There were 465 separate reactions reported, referring to 293 individuals.

Around a third involved gastrointestinal problems, such as vomiting and diarrhoea.

But there were also cases of heart and eye problems - together with 46 cases of psychiatric disorders and 48 disorders of the nervous system. There has also been one unexplained death.

Last week England's top doctor urged parents to continue giving their children Tamiflu if they come down with swine flu.

Sir [Liam Donaldson](#), the chief medical officer, appealed for calm after the release of a study which showed that 53 per cent of children who take it suffer from nausea, nightmares and other reactions.

Sir Liam said: 'All drugs do have side effects. It is always a case of deciding the balance between benefiting a patient from a treatment and the side effects.'

There are, however, fears that if Tamiflu and the other antiviral drug Relenza are given to too many, it could lead to the flu virus developing resistance to them - leaving Britain defenceless against swine flu until the arrival of new vaccines.

A spokesman for the MHRA said: 'Tamiflu and Relenza are acceptably safe medicines and most people will not suffer any side effects. The balance of risks and benefits for Tamiflu and Relenza remains positive.'

Gap year students have been advised against charity work in Third World countries - because they could do more harm than good by spreading swine flu.

Professor Robert Dingwall, an adviser to the Department of Health, said young Britons had a 'personal ethical responsibility' to consider cancelling such work.

Developing countries have a shortage of antiviral drugs, and are likely to be at the back of the queue once a vaccine becomes available.

Writing in the Observer, Professor Dingwall added: 'Staying at home this year will often be the morally right thing to do.'