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## Genital Herpes Virus Infections Acyclovir Ointment Effective in Initial Attacks

A new drug, Acyclovir, trademark Zovirax, has recently been licensed by the Food and Drug Administration in ointment form for therapy in the treatment of initial attacks of cutaneous Herpes simplex virus infections. It is currently estimated that from 5 to 20 million active cases currently exist in the United States, with 300,000 to 500,000 new cases occurring each year. It is thought that genital herpes has had at least a ten-fold increase in the past decade.

Symptoms of the initial infection with genital herpes are itching, burning, and pain and usually develop about six days after contact. Other symptoms may include swollen glands, fever, headaches, joint pain, and general fatigue. The symptoms become more intense over a period of seven to ten days and are followed by the formation of small, fluid-filled blisters that eventually crust over, then scab and heal. The initial infection may last three to six weeks and sometimes longer. However, the patient is not cured. The virus has not been eliminated. The Herpes simplex virus enters nerves and remains dormant until some event results in the virus returning to the surface of the skin and creating a recurrent infection. Such events include fever, respiratory infections, lack of sleep, emotional upset, menstruation, sexual intercourse, excessive sun, wind, and cold, and mechanical friction.

Recurrent infections may never return, or may return several times a year and sometimes even monthly. But recurrent infections are usually less severe than the initial infection with less pain and shorter duration. However, the lesions which occur in recurrent attacks shed virus and are infective to others until they heal.

Acyclovir has been shown to reduce the days of pain and to reduce the duration of viral shedding (infectivity) in initial attacks of herpes. Unfortunately, Acyclovir does not cure genital herpes. Recurrences are just as frequent in patients treated with the drug as with those treated with a placebo. Acyclovir did not produce resolution of lesions or relief of symptoms for recurrent herpes infections. There is no evidence of symptomatic benefit from using topical Acyclovir in recurrent genital herpes. The FDA has not licensed the drug for that use.

In summary, Acyclovir Ointment is a new drug which provides partial treatment in genital herpes. Its use should be confined to initial genital disease where it will reduce the duration of viral shedding, hasten the resolution of lesions, and decrease the pain and other symptoms.

### **Malaria Chemoprophylaxis for Travelers Fansidar now Available in the United States**

Chloroquine phosphate is the drug usually recommended in the United States for travelers to malaria endemic areas. However, strains of Plasmodium falciparum have become increasingly resistant to chloroquine. Chloroquine-resistant strains of P. falciparum are found in the Amazon basin, Central America, Asia, and East Africa. Fansidar (Roche Laboratories) is a fixed combination of 25 mg pyrimethamine and 500 mg sulfadoxine in one tablet and can be effective in the chemosuppression of Plasmodium falciparum that is resistant to chloroquine. Fansidar was licensed for sale in the United States in January 1982.

When Fansidar prophylaxis is indicated, chloroquine should always be taken concurrently. Fansidar and chloroquine should be taken weekly beginning at least one day before exposure and until six weeks after last exposure.

Adverse reactions to Fansidar have been few. The drug is not recommended for pregnant women because pyrimethamine is teratogenic in animals. Fansidar is also contraindicated for persons who are allergic to sulfonamides and for infants less than three months of age. Additional information can be obtained through the State Epidemiologist, 561-4406.

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