



1st April 2022

Circular 008/22

Azithromycin Prophylaxis Guideline

Dear Pharmacist,

Please find enclosed a letter from HSE Clinical Lead Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control, Prof Martin Cormican and HSE Clinical Lead National Clinical Programme in Respiratory Medicine, Dr Des Murphy in relation to azithromycin prophylaxis.

The published guidance on azithromycin prophylaxis can be found online at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/gp/antibiotic-prescribing/conditions-and-treatments/lower-respiratory/azithromycin-prophylaxis-in-adults-with-respiratory-disease/>.

Further information can also be found at www.antibioticprescribing.ie.

Yours Sincerely,

Shaun Flanagan
Primary Care Eligibility & Reimbursement



Prof. Martín Cormican, Treoir Chliniciúil Náisiúnta Cúram
Sláinte a bhaineann le Frithsheasmhacht in aghaidh
Ionfhabhtú agus Fritmhiocróbach
Ospidéal Réigiúnach Pháirc, Mheirlinne, Gaillimh

Prof. Martin Cormican, National Clinical Lead for HCAI/AMR
(Healthcare Associated Infections / Antimicrobial Resistance)
1st Floor, Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit,
Merlin Park Hospital, Galway, H91 N973

Email: martin.cormican@hse.ie
Web: www.hse.ie/hcai

By email only

21 March 2022

FAO: Clinical Directors, Consultants in Respiratory Medicine, Consultants in Medicine, General Practitioners, Nurse Prescribers, Respiratory Clinical Nurse Specialists, Consultant Microbiologists, Infectious Diseases Physicians, Antimicrobial Pharmacists, Community Pharmacists, Audiologists.

Re: Azithromycin Prophylaxis Guideline

Dear Colleague,

We are delighted to inform you of the publication of [guidance on azithromycin prophylaxis](#). This was developed by the HSE Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Team (AMRIC), the HSE Antimicrobial Stewardship Advisory Group, the National Clinical Programme for Respiratory Medicine & the HSE National Antibiotic Guidelines Working Group.

Azithromycin prophylaxis may be beneficial for a small subgroup of patients who have repeated exacerbations of COPD, bronchiectasis or asthma as it has been shown to decrease the number of exacerbations.

Azithromycin is an antibiotic with a significant adverse effect profile including: gastrointestinal upset, hearing and balance disturbance, liver and cardiac effects. To ensure maximum benefit with the least harm it is important patients initiated on azithromycin prophylaxis are selected carefully and reviewed regularly. If the patient shows no clinical benefit or experiences adverse effects azithromycin prophylaxis should be stopped.

Point prevalence studies of antimicrobial prescribing in community residential care facilities, feedback from GPs as part of the AMRIC/PCRS green/red antibiotic quality improvement initiative and anecdotal evidence from hospital colleagues indicate that there is scope for improvement in how azithromycin is used. This guidance was developed to support that quality improvement.

The guidance details initiation criteria, recommendations for review every 6-12 months, and good practice points on when to de-prescribe if there is no evidence of clinical benefit or there is evidence of adverse effects. The primary drivers for this initiative is to ensure that azithromycin is used for patients who may benefit from it and to improve patient safety. Administering azithromycin prophylaxis in patients not receiving benefit does no good and can lead to considerable harm such as deafness, prolonged QT interval, liver damage, *Clostridioides difficile* diarrhoea or antimicrobial resistance.

We are asking for your help in achieving quality improvement in your service with regards to azithromycin prophylaxis use.



We request that the guidance, and how it can support quality improvement processes in your healthcare setting, be considered by relevant forums such as at practice meetings, the Medical Directorate, Drugs and Therapeutics / Antimicrobial Stewardship Committee, Quality and Patient Safety Committee and Audit Committee.

A collaborative group has developed an audit tool and patient information leaflet to support the implementation of this guidance and these are available alongside the guidance in the lower respiratory section of www.antibioticprescribing.ie .

Thank you for your assistance in implementing this patient safety work. If you have any comments or suggestions for improvement in the guidance or supporting resources please let us know.

Regards



Professor Martin Cormican MCRN 011105
HSE Clinical Lead Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control



Dr Des Murphy MCRN 22267
HSE Clinical Lead National Clinical Programme in Respiratory Medicine