Severe Illness with non-Pharmaceutical Chloroquine Phosphate

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a health safety alert to inform the public that commercially available non-pharmaceutical chloroquine phosphate, such as that used in aquariums, is not safe and does not provide protection from COVID-19 infection.

The Issue: There have been two cases where people ingested chloroquine phosphate used in aquariums in an attempt to prevent COVID-19 infection. One patient died and the other is critically ill.

There are no medications to treat or prevent SARS CoV-19 transmission at this time. Based on theory and a small study, the FDA and other organizations are evaluating medications such as chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine in patients with COVID-19 infection. These medications have been highlighted to the public, often as a treatment, which remains unproven.

Chloroquine phosphate, when used without a prescription and supervision of a healthcare provider, can cause serious health consequences, including death. Clinicians and public health officials should discourage the public from misusing non-pharmaceutical chloroquine phosphate. Clinicians should advise patients that chloroquine, and the related compound hydroxychloroquine, should be used only under the supervision of a healthcare provider as prescribed medications.

The CDC recommends that clinicians:

- Educate patients on the serious risks of misusing non-pharmaceutical chloroquine products and other aquarium use chemicals.
- Counsel patients on the importance of taking medications only as prescribed and as directed by healthcare providers.
- Contact your local poison center (1-800-222-1222) to report cases and to obtain specific medical management of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine poisoning.
- Adverse events related to pharmaceuticals can be reported to the FDA MedWatch program (be sure to include “Indian Health Service” in the reporter section (section G) of the FDA 3500 form. Instructions for reporting Adverse Drug Events can be found on the IHS Pharmacovigilance Website.

The full CDC Health Advisory can be viewed online.