

Consumer Summary – COVID Antivirals Forum

Context

This document summarises information provided during Health Issues Centre's COVID-19 forums held Wednesday 7th and Thursday 8th of September, titled *Antivirals – How do they work, who should use them and how do we increase uptake?*

These two forums, made possible by an education grant from Pfizer, were led by [Dr Anita Muñoz](#), Chair of the RACGP Victoria Council, Board Member, and member of the COVID Committee. Anita is also a GP in private practice in Melbourne's CBD.

Presentation key points

- Antivirals work best on mild to moderate disease in people who have risk factors for the disease to become more serious
- Antivirals are expensive when purchased privately (but covered under the PBS for eligible consumers) and a precious resource
- If eligible, consumers should start the conversation with their GP early and create a plan for antivirals before they get sick
- Antivirals are no substitution for vaccination nor are they a substitute for abandoning personal COVID-19 precautions and safety measures

A forum recording is available here: <https://youtu.be/sjzGej7vNUc>. Slides are located at Attachment A.

Q&A Summary

When and how do I take them?

They need to be taken orally within five days of symptom onset or COVID-19 diagnosis. Please be aware that the antiviral, Paxlovid, requires that the person who is using them must be able to swallow as they cannot be crushed into a powder.

In the case of repeated infection, can you take the antiviral twice?

Yes, you can. Given how aggressive the new variants are in terms of infection, the minimum interval between treatment courses is approximately one month.

How much do they cost?

Privately, they cost between \$1,100 - \$1,500, but under the PBS, eligible people only pay an out-of-pocket gap fee of \$42.50 (or \$6.80 if they hold a concession card).

Can I purchase them prior to getting sick?

No, you are not able to purchase ahead of illness unless you are willing to pay the private cost.

What conditions classify as 'immunocompromised'?

In the context of anti-viral treatment eligibility, ME/Chronic fatigue syndrome, psoriasis and eczema do not meet the eligibility criteria for immuno-compromised. If you are concerned about whether you fit the eligibility criteria, it is best to start the conversation with your GP early.

Will I need to provide any additional information to my GP?

Your GP will want to know your full medical history as well as all the medications you are currently taking. It might be helpful to have these written down and readily available.

How do I prove a COVID-19 diagnosis?

Keep documentation of your PCR or RAT test – a photograph will suffice.

If you have any additional queries or concerns, please contact us at info@hic.org.au

Oral antiviral treatments for COVID-19

How do they work, who should take them and how can people access them?

Dr Anita Muñoz
GP and RACGP Victoria Council Chair



Agenda

- What oral antiviral treatments for COVID-19 are, how they work and what treatments are available
- Eligibility criteria for accessing antiviral treatments
- Considerations for prescribing these treatments
- Possible side effects
- How to access these treatments?
- Vaccination and other preventative measures
- Further resources
- Q&A

What are COVID-19 antivirals and how do they work?

Paxlovid
(nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir)



Lagevrio
(molnupiravir)



Both treatments...

- belong to a group of medicines called antivirals
- work by targeting the virus that causes COVID-19 and preventing it from infecting healthy human cells
- have been shown to reduce the risk of severe infection and hospitalisation in those with mild to moderate COVID-19 with one or more risk factors
- must be commenced within 5 days of symptom onset
- are taken twice a day for 5 days



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Who can be prescribed
COVID-19 antivirals?

Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for the oral treatments you must:

- have confirmed COVID -19 (PCR or RAT)
- have mild or moderate illness (or be asymptomatic if you are 70 years of age or older)
- be able to start the treatment within 5 days of symptom onset

AND be:

- 70 years of age or older**
- 50 years of age or older with two other risk factors for severe disease
- identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, and be 30 years of age or older with two other risk factors for severe disease; or
- 18 years of age or older and moderately to severely immunocompromised.



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Why would one medicine be prescribed over another?

Considerations include:

- Do you have liver or kidney disease?
- What other medicines do you take?
- Can you swallow medicines?
- Are you pregnant, trying to conceive or breastfeeding?



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What are possible side effects
of these treatments?

Possible side effects

Paxlovid:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Headache
- High blood pressure
- Aching muscle, muscle tenderness or weakness not due to exercise
- Changes in taste or a metallic taste in the mouth
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain
- Generally feeling unwell.

Lagevrio:

- Diarrhoea
- Nausea
- Dizziness



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How can you access these medicines?



COVID-19 oral treatment is no replacement for vaccination, nor complacency

Where can you find more information?

Resources:

Victorian Government Coronavirus website

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covid-19-medicines>



Healthdirect - Medications for treating COVID-19

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/covid-19/medications>



Consumer medicine information – Lagevrio (NPS MedicineWise website)

<https://www.nps.org.au/medicine-finder/lagevrio-capsules>



Consumer medicine information – Paxlovid (NPS MedicineWise website)

<https://www.nps.org.au/medicine-finder/paxlovid>



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