

What You Should Know About Drug Treatments for COVID-19



You may have heard about potential drug treatments for COVID-19. But what is really known about these treatments? It can be hard to tell if what you're hearing or reading is trustworthy, just speculation, or misinformation.

When it comes to your health and the health of others, it's important to know what really works for treating this disease.

- Most cases of COVID-19 can be managed at home — follow the advice of your [local public health authority](#).
- Contact your health care provider or local public health information line for advice or if you think you have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they worsen.
- A limited number of drugs have been approved in Canada to treat COVID-19.
- Don't use unproven COVID-19 drug treatments — they could harm you or you might be taking those treatments away from people who need them for other illnesses.

What drugs can help treat COVID-19?

A limited number of drugs have been approved in Canada to treat COVID-19. These drugs must be given in a health care setting by a health care professional. For example, remdesivir is used only in the hospital for very sick patients who can't breathe on their own and who are being closely monitored by hospital staff.

There are no recommended drugs for preventing COVID-19 and no natural health products are known to help. The other potential COVID-19 drugs we've been hearing about — like chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine, HIV protease inhibitors, ivermectin, and convalescent plasma — may look promising, but we don't yet know if they work.

A treatment shouldn't be used until it's been thoroughly tested to find out if it works and is safe. In many cases, treatments that were once thought to have been promising have been shown not to work or to cause more harm than good.

Even though there are COVID-19 vaccines available, not every Canadian will have had a chance to get vaccinated until late 2021. So, in the meantime, you should continue to protect yourself from getting and spreading COVID-19.

I've heard of people using drugs that have not been proven to treat COVID-19. Why are they using them if they don't work?

There are some people taking unproven COVID-19 drug treatments because they're involved in a clinical trial — a study to find out if a drug is helpful and safe. Patients may also be given these drugs in the hospital as a last resort if their COVID-19 symptoms are serious or life-threatening and aren't improving.

What are the potential risks of using an unproven COVID-19 drug treatment?

You could be putting yourself at risk.

- If you use an unproven drug treatment for COVID-19, it could harm you.
- Some of the unproven, suggested treatments for COVID-19 are already in use for other illnesses. So, you might think there's no risk in trying these drugs. But although they're safe to use for these other illnesses, they might be harmful if taken for COVID-19.
- All drugs can cause side effects. So, before you use a drug to treat any illness, the possible benefits should be known to outweigh the possible harms.

You could be putting others at risk.

- By using an unproven drug treatment for COVID-19, you could be contributing to drug shortages. A drug shortage is when there's less of a drug available than what's needed.
- Using drugs for COVID-19 could mean that people who take the same drugs for other illnesses (for which they've been proven to work) might not be able to get them. Instead, we should save these treatments for people who depend on them to stay healthy.

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you become ill with COVID-19, you will most likely have a mild case of the disease that will go away on its own. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include a cough that is new or getting worse, trouble breathing or being short of breath, feeling tired or weak, loss of smell or taste, headache, fever, chills, body aches, stomach pain, diarrhea, and vomiting. Often, you can manage your symptoms at home.

You should follow the advice of your local public health authority and:

- stay in your home
- avoid contact with others, including other members of your household
- monitor your symptoms.

If you are concerned about your symptoms, your symptoms worsen, or you need advice, call your health care provider or local public health information line. More severe cases of COVID-19 may need to be treated in a hospital.

A lot of what I know about COVID-19 is from the internet. How do I know if the information is trustworthy?

Be skeptical! Information you find on the internet is not always credible and is sometimes just meant to grab your attention. But there are a few things you can look for that might indicate that a website is not providing trustworthy information.

Be suspicious when:

- The information is based on only one person's experience or is supported only by personal testimonials.
- The information is presented in a sensational, overly emotional, or alarmist way.
- The claims seem to suggest that the treatment works for everyone (e.g., a 100% success rate).
- The website is also trying to sell you something.

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- You can't really tell who wrote the content or what qualifications they have; they might be acting in their own best interests instead of yours.
- Research studies are mentioned, but information that would help you find those studies isn't given or the studies are old (from 10 years ago or more).
- There are several spelling mistakes and/or typos on the website.
- There are many broken links, which could mean that the information on the website hasn't been kept up-to-date.

Finally, keep in mind that we're learning new things about COVID-19 and how to treat it almost every day. So take note of when the information was posted. What was understood at the time may not be the same as what is known today.

Where can I find trustworthy information on COVID-19?



Health Canada

[COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

The Public Health Agency of Canada

[General information about COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#)

[Up-to-date information on the spread of COVID-19 in Canada](#)

The Medical Library Association

[COVID-19 Resources for Patients and the Public](#)

Choosing Wisely Canada

[COVID-19 Recommendations for the Public and for Clinicians](#)

World Health Organization

[Q&A on coronaviruses \(COVID-19\)](#)

Reviewers of this handout included Dawn Richards, an individual who lives with rheumatoid arthritis and a volunteer Vice-President of the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance, and staff members of the Pharmaceutical Services Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Health.

ABOUT CADTH

CADTH is an independent, not-for-profit organization responsible for providing Canada's health care decision-makers with objective evidence to help make informed decisions about the optimal use of drugs and medical devices in our health care system.

CADTH receives funding from Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments, with the exception of Quebec.

January 2021