On December 22, 2021, the FDA issued an Emergency Use Authorization for Pfizer’s antiviral medication Paxlovid. Paxlovid is considered an antiviral medication; it consists of two oral medications that are given together as pills.¹ This authorization makes treatments available for emergency use.

This fact sheet contains information about the Paxlovid antiviral treatment and is intended to help you make an informed decision about receiving treatment that may help reduce your risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms.

**How does Paxlovid work?**

Paxlovid consist of nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets, co-packaged for oral use. Nirmatrelvir stops the virus from replicating by inhibiting a viral protein, and ritonavir slows down nirmatrelvir’s breakdown to help it remain in the body for a longer period at higher concentrations. Paxlovid is given immediately after testing positive for COVID-19.¹

**Who is Paxlovid for?**

Paxlovid treats mild to moderate COVID-19 in adults and pediatric patients ages 12 and over and weighing at least 40 kilograms or about 88 pounds with positive results of PCR testing, and who are at high risk of severe COVID-19, including hospitalization and/or death (see Figure 1).¹²

Paxlovid is available by prescription only and should be initiated as soon as possible after diagnosis of COVID-19 and within five days of symptom onset.¹

Paxlovid is not authorized for the pre-exposure or post-exposure prevention of COVID-19 or for initiation of treatment in those requiring hospitalization due to severe or critical COVID-19. Paxlovid is not a substitute for vaccination.³

Paxlovid is not recommended in patients with severe kidney or severe liver impairment. In patients with moderate renal impairment, a reduced Paxlovid dose is needed. Patients with kidney or liver problems should discuss with their healthcare provider whether Paxlovid is right for them.¹

Paxlovid may reduce the efficacy of combined hormonal contraceptives. Patients are advised to use an effective alternative contraceptive method or an additional barrier method of contraception while taking Paxlovid.¹

Taking Paxlovid with certain medicines may cause serious or life-threatening side effects or affect how Paxlovid works (see Figure 2). Do not take Paxlovid if you are allergic to any of the ingredients in Paxlovid.¹
Liver Problems

Possible side effects of Paxlovid are

• Itching
• Yellowing of your skin
• Pale-colored stools
• Itchy skin
• Stomach (abdominal) pain

Benefits of treatment with Paxlovid include:

1. Reduced risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms
2. Reduced risk of hospitalization
3. Reduced risk of death from COVID-19
4. Oral treatment eliminates the time needed to receive the alternative infusion treatment in a medical setting, and treatment may be completed at home

Possible side effects of Paxlovid are:

Liver Problems

• Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these signs and symptoms of liver problems: loss of appetite, yellowing of your skin and the whites of eyes (jaundice), dark-colored urine, pale colored stools and itchy skin, or stomach area (abdominal) pain.

Resistance to HIV Medicines

• If you have untreated HIV infection, Paxlovid may lead to some HIV medicines not working as well in the future.

Other possible side effects include:

• Altered sense of taste
• Diarrhea
• High blood pressure
• Muscle aches

Paxlovid is still being studied, so it is possible that all risks are not known at this time.

Is Paxlovid safe?

In preclinical studies, Paxlovid did not show evidence of human DNA mutations. The FDA has determined that it is reasonable to believe that Paxlovid may be effective for treating mild to moderate COVID-19 in authorized patients. The agency has also determined that potential benefits of Paxlovid, when used consistent with the terms and conditions of the authorization, outweigh the potential risks of the product. Paxlovid is the first authorized oral treatment for COVID-19.

Where can I receive Paxlovid treatment for COVID-19?

Paxlovid may only be prescribed for an individual patient by physicians, advanced practice registered nurses, and physician assistants that are licensed or authorized under state law to prescribe anti-infective drugs.

Resources


How is Paxlovid given?

Paxlovid is administered as three tablets (two 150mg tablets of nirmatrelvir and one 100mg tablet of ritonavir) taken together orally twice daily for five days, for a total of 30 tablets. Paxlovid is not authorized for use for longer than five consecutive days. Paxlovid is a prescription-only medication to be initiated as soon as possible after diagnosis and within three days of symptom onset.

What are the benefits of receiving Paxlovid?

Benefits of treatment with Paxlovid include:

1. Reduced risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms
2. Reduced risk of hospitalization
3. Reduced risk of death from COVID-19
4. Oral treatment eliminates the time needed to receive the alternative infusion treatment in a medical setting, and treatment may be completed at home

What are the possible risks of receiving Paxlovid?

Possible side effects of Paxlovid are:

Liver Problems

• Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these signs and symptoms of liver problems: loss of appetite, yellowing of your skin and the whites of eyes (jaundice), dark-colored urine, pale colored stools and itchy skin, or stomach area (abdominal) pain.

Figure 2: Do not take Paxlovid if you are taking any of the following medicines:

- Alfuzosin
- Pethidine, piroxicam, propoxyphene
- Ranolazine
- Amiodarone, dronedarone, flecainide, propafenone, quinidine
- Colchicine
- Lurasidone, pimozide, clozapine
- Dihydroergotamine, ergotamine, methylergonovine
- Lovastatin, simvastatin
- Sildenafil (Revatio) for pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH)
- Triazolam, oral midazolam
- Certain anticancer drugs
- Certain anticonvulsants
- Certain Antimycobacterials
- St. John’s Wort (hypericum perforatum)

These are not the only medicines that may cause serious side effects if taken with Paxlovid.