

Headline: [VIDEO] Fancy pharmaceuticals? Your guide to the newest COVID treatments

Blurb: South Africa's medical regulator is currently reviewing applications for an oral COVID treatment called molnupiravir. The tablet can reduce people's chances of falling very ill or dying from the disease. Here's how it works.

Bullets:

- **Molnupiravir, a COVID treatment that can reduce people's chances of falling seriously ill or dying, could be in South Africa by the end of the year.**
- **South Africa's medicines regulator is currently reviewing applications for emergency approval of the pills.**
- **The tablets do not replace vaccines but work to stop the virus from making copies of itself after you've been infected.**

Byline: Dylan Bush & Aisha Abdool Karim

South Africa could have a new COVID pill before the end of the year.

Drug manufacturer Cipla has begun making molnupiravir, a treatment that can lower the chance of people falling seriously ill or dying from COVID.

The medication has already been approved for use in the United States and England.

South Africa's medicines regulator is currently reviewing several applications for the approval of molnupiravir.

But molnupiravir isn't the only tablet COVID patients can use.

Pharmaceutical company Pfizer has developed a drug called Paxlovid.

These pills work slightly differently from molnupiravir but also lower someone's chances of ending up in hospital from COVID.

Both are antiviral medications so they stop the virus from replicating in your body after you've been infected.

But neither tablet is a replacement for vaccines.

Here's how the treatments work:

Instead of trying to kill the virus off completely, the pills slow down the spread of the germ in your body.

Reducing the amount of virus in your body lowers your chances of becoming very ill and ending up in hospital.

Each pill works in its own way.

Molnupiravir causes the SARS-CoV-2 virus to mutate itself to death.

It does this by confusing the virus during the copying process. That way errors appear that eventually render the germ dysfunctional.

Paxlovid, on the other hand, stops the copying process from happening.

Paxlovid targets a part of the virus that allows it to move between cells and replicate. By removing this function, the germ can no longer spread in your body.

What were the results?

Trials for both pills looked at people who were at high risk of falling seriously ill with COVID.

This includes:

- people over 60
- people with cancer, heart problems, kidney or lung disease
- people who are obese.

The study participants weren't vaccinated, so they had a high chance of ending up in hospital if they got sick.

Molnupiravir reduced the risk of hospitalisation by 30% in these high-risk COVID patients.

The Merck drug lowered the chances of dying from COVID by 89%.

So what does the Paxlovid pill do?

In a Pfizer study, it reduced the likelihood of people falling very sick with COVID by 88%.

Both studies included infections caused by different variants, so the treatments protected people regardless of which form of the virus made them sick.

What's the downside?

Supply is still very limited.

As with vaccines, demand for the drugs is high and the manufacturing process takes time.

Although the side effects of the drugs are mild, the treatments aren't right for everyone.

The way in which molnupiravir works may make it unsuitable for pregnant women, but scientists need more data to be sure.

One of the ingredients in Paxlovid can reduce how well your body absorbs other medications.