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MANATŪ HAUORA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Update on prescribing of antiviral medicines

News article
31 May 2022

Access to treatment for COVID-19 in the community has been widened, with dedicated pharmacists prescribers now able to prescribe antiviral medicines.

A notice was published in the Gazette this week, adding medicines for treating COVID-19 to the schedule that can be prescribed by a dedicated pharmacists prescriber.

This will mean some pharmacists will be able to prescribe antiviral medicines for treating COVID-19, instead of needing to wait to see another prescriber in the team.

The decision to enable pharmacists to prescribe a specific medicine is independent from Medsafe's decision to approve a medicine for use or Pharmac's decision to fund a medicine

Clinical Chief Advisor Andi Shirtcliffe said: "Increasing the range of prescribers will improve access to these medicines for a wider range of communities and get timely treatment to more of the people who are at risk of severe illness."

Medicines added to the pharmacist prescriber medicine list include nirmatrelvir with ritonavir (Paxlovid™) and molnupiravir (Lagevrio®), which are already being prescribed by other prescribers in New Zealand.

Both these medicines can be taken orally at home and are for people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have symptoms, and are at a higher risk of hospitalisation including Māori and Pacific peoples, those with complex health needs, the elderly and unvaccinated populations, and people with disabilities.

The medicines were added to the pharmacist prescriber medicine list after consultation with the sector, including the Pharmacy Council, which ran between 22 April and 22 May. Of the submissions received, more than 90% agreed with the proposed additions to the schedule.

A summary of the consultation will be published on the Ministry's website soon.

Additional information

Nine COVID-19 therapeutics have been added to the schedule for designated pharmacist prescribers.

Of these, four active ingredients have already been approved for use in New Zealand are included, covering three products.

These include:

- **Nirmatrelvir with ritonavir (Paxlovid™) and molnupiravir (Lagevrio®)** – Both are five-day courses of tablets or capsules. They need to be taken within five days of a person first developing symptoms for COVID-19. These medicines are prescribed to people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have symptoms, and are at a higher risk of hospitalisation including Māori and Pacific peoples, those with complex health needs, the elderly and unvaccinated populations, and people with disabilities.
- **Casirivimab and imdevimab (Ronapreve)** – A drug provided by an infusion or subcutaneous injection under the supervision of a healthcare professional, and is already available in New Zealand. Ronapreve is prescribed for adults and adolescents with COVID-19 who do not require supplemental oxygen for COVID-19 and who are at increased risk of progressing to severe COVID-19. Ronapreve is known to be effective against the Delta variant and research is now focusing on its effectiveness against the Omicron variant. Medsafe will continue to evaluate that information when it becomes available. In addition, these unapproved medicines have also been added to the schedule.
- **Etesevimab, sotrovimab (Xevudy), ensovibep, cilgavimab, tixagevimab** – Medsafe has not yet approved these medicines for use in New Zealand, therefore these cannot be prescribed, by pharmacists or other clinicians, at this stage. However, adding these medicines to schedule will help widen access to prescribers in the event these medicines are approved for use in New Zealand in the future.

More information about COVID treatments approved for use and under active consideration (http://https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/treatment-applications.asp)

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