

# Anti-COVID-19 medications can have lethal complications if used inappropriately

April 2 2020, by Elisabeth Reitman

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The heightened awareness around the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as well as other experimental treatments for COVID-19 has led to reports of risky behaviors, according to Yale

School of Medicine physicians.

The race to develop a treatment for the coronavirus is underway, with hundreds of clinical trials worldwide. Hydroxychloroquine as well as other treatments have received widespread media attention, but physicians urge caution against their use without the supervision of a qualified [physician](#).

According to the [CDC](#), [hydroxychloroquine](#) is recommended as an [experimental treatment](#) for hospitalized COVID-19 patients in several countries. Other antibiotics such as azithromycin and new medications are also under investigation. As new information about COVID-19 emerges, electrophysiologists from the Yale School of Medicine discuss the safety of these potential treatments.

Hydroxychloroquine is an antimalarial [drug](#) also used to treat rheumatological diseases such as lupus. Other medications have proven indications and have been used safely for many years. "However, chloroquine when combined with azithromycin or taken in excessive doses, may cause changes in the heart's electrical system that can potentially lead to sudden cardiac death," said Rachel Lampert, MD.

"Hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin have been linked with prolongation of the QT interval." Often referred to as acquired LQTS, this condition may trigger a fast or irregular heartbeat. "Patients with chronic medical conditions such as [kidney failure](#), diabetes or heart disease are especially at risk," adds Joseph Akar, MD, Ph.D.

"To avoid the harmful side effects, these medications should not be taken without appropriate supervision from a physician," said Lynda Rosenfeld, MD. "Another concern is that when not prescribed by a physician, people may purchase contaminated or counterfeit drugs."

There is currently no Food and Drug Administration (FDA) treatment approved for COVID-19, although a number of drugs are under investigation. Reports of overprescribing possible coronavirus treatments in non-hospitalized patients have become an additional concern. "When we do this the risk is twofold, said Eric Grubman, MD. "First, the patients who rely on these treatments cannot access it. Second, as misinformation about a potential cure for COVID-19 spreads, people may assume that we no longer need to practice social distancing."

"The best way to stay safe from the coronavirus is to stay home, wash your hands frequently and practice social distancing," adds Rachel Lampert, MD.

Provided by Yale University

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