

Could a common heartburn drug treat COVID-19? One hospital system is trying it

April 28 2020, by Mark Price



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The active compound in heartburn remedies like Pepcid has emerged as part of the nation's latest hope for a COVID-19 treatment.

Doctors at New York's Northwell Health hospital system have been testing famotidine intravenously on patients "at nine times the heartburn dose," *Science Magazine* reported.

The idea came to researchers after it was noted some older virus survivors in China had been taking famotidine for chronic heartburn versus more expensive treatments, CNN reported.

Test patients at Northwell Health facilities are being given famotidine in combination with another much publicized test [drug](#), antimalarial hydroxychloroquine, ABC News reported. The tests have been kept quiet to avoid "a potential depletion of national supply" by panicked shoppers, the news outlet said.

"I think this sort of off-label repurposing is sensible with drugs for which we have a long safety record," Dr. Stuart Ray of Johns Hopkins told ABC. "And we really need a win."

Hydroxychloroquine, which President Donald Trump touted as a possible [coronavirus](#) treatment, has long been used "to treat malaria and autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus," according to GoodRX.com.

"There is not enough medical data at this time to prove that hydroxychloroquine (works) for COVID-19—while some small studies suggest the medications may be helpful, other studies saw no difference," the site reports.

David Battinelli, [vice president](#) and chief medical officer of Northwell Health, told the New York Post "the heartburn drug shows promise," but trials are far from complete. The hospital has tested it on more than 150 patients and "hopes to recruit up to 1,250 patients" to participate, the Post reported.

Famotidine, which is available without a prescription, is used to treat heartburn and ulcers and is primarily known for decreasing the amount of acid produced by the stomach, the Mayo Clinic says. It was approved by the FDA in 1986 and has been sold over the counter since 1995, according to Pepcid's website.

It is one of multiple drugs being tested for effectiveness against the coronavirus, including the blood pressure medicine losartan and the "failed Ebola drug" remdesivir, Live Science says.

"There are no drugs or other therapeutics presently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to prevent or treat COVID-19," the Centers for Disease Control reports.

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