

# Russia to treat virus cases with anti-malaria drug

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The Russian government has authorised the use of an anti-malarial drug to treat coronavirus patients despite international concerns over its safety and effectiveness.

The government published an order late Thursday allowing the use of [hydroxychloroquine](#) on patients after China donated more than 68,000 packs of the tablets to Russia.

The order was published after President Vladimir Putin had a [phone conversation](#) with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Thursday evening.

It said the drug would be distributed to hospitals that are caring for patients who have tested positive for coronavirus or are suspected of having it. It said the drug's safety and effectiveness will be monitored by the state health watchdog.

Hydroxychloroquine has been used for decades against malaria and is being tested worldwide against the [virus](#) along with another anti-malarial drug, chloroquine.

Both have potentially [serious side effects](#), especially in high doses or when administered with other medications, and their use to treat the virus is still experimental, without having gone through exhaustive clinical testing.

Some see them as a potential weapon in the fight against the virus while there is still no proven cure or vaccine.

Hydroxychloroquine has shown early promise against COVID-19 in small-scale studies in France and China to reduce virus levels among people badly infected.

US President Donald Trump has touted it as a coronavirus treatment and in the US a limited emergency-use authorisation has been granted to the [drug](#).

But many scientists are urging caution until larger trials show whether it is safe and effective.

The European Medicines Agency has said that both chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine need to go through clinical trials and should not be

used to treat virus cases unless there is a "national emergency."

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