

Trump taking drug discredited as safe or effective against coronavirus

May 19 2020, by E.j. Mundell, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Despite numerous studies suggesting that certain drugs

touted by President Donald Trump as "game changers" against coronavirus are actually useless and even harmful, Trump on Monday claimed he has been taking one of them for more than a week.

Trump said he has been taking the [drug](#) hydroxychloroquine for about a week and a half in an effort to help prevent infection or illness with SARS-CoV-2, the new [coronavirus](#). He said he is taking the drug with the approval of the White House physician.

Trump said, "All I can tell you is, so far I seem to be OK," *The New York Times* reported.

Early in the coronavirus pandemic, Trump pointed to hydroxychloroquine and a related drug, chloroquine, as perhaps a quick medicinal solution to the growing coronavirus scourge.

But any early promise on the drugs' potential against the virus soon fizzled.

For example, one U.S. study published in late April found the death rate for people with COVID-19 who took hydroxychloroquine on top of usual care was actually higher than those who didn't— 28% vs. 11%, respectively.

Soon after, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a statement that "hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine have not been shown to be safe and effective for treating or preventing COVID-19."

The FDA also warned that "hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine can cause [abnormal heart rhythms](#) such as QT interval prolongation and a dangerously rapid heart rate called ventricular tachycardia."

On May 8, New York City physicians reporting in the *New England*

Journal of Medicine tracked outcomes for nearly 1,400 patients with severe COVID-19. Those that got hydroxychloroquine fared no better than those who did not.

Two other studies showing similar results were published just last week.

Despite all the bad scientific news on hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine, the mere fact that Trump endorsed the drugs triggered a surge in sales. A study led by Michael Liu at Oxford University in the United Kingdom found that Google searches indicative of online shopping for hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine surged by 1389% following Trump's endorsement.

Dr. Matthew Heinz is a hospitalist and internist at Tucson Medical Center in Arizona. Reacting to Trump's announcement on Monday, he said that, "I cannot stress enough how reckless it is to encourage anybody to take hydroxychloroquine or any other unproven remedy for SARS-CoV-2."

"Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine are not benign substances and can cause serious, sometimes life-threatening, adverse effects," including sometimes fatal cardiac arrhythmias, he noted. "This is especially true when so many people already have underlying cardiac and other [medical conditions](#)—they are even more susceptible to such side effects."

According to the *Times*, Trump, 73, is statistically obese at 243 pounds, eats fatty food, shuns exercise, and takes a cholesterol-lowering statin.

Heinz said that beyond any theoretical threat to the president's health, supporting the use of hydroxychloroquine poses a threat to the health of those who might copy his actions.

"Our [political leadership](#) must serve as an example during this pandemic

and should reinforce the recommendations of qualified medical professionals and public health officials," Heinz said. "Taking hydroxychloroquine is *not* recommended to treat or prevent COVID-19."

The drug is useful in treating other conditions, such as lupus.

So, "encouraging off-label use of [hydroxychloroquine](#) [plaquenil] has caused shortages of the medication for patients, like my own sister, who rely on the medication for other conditions," Heinz said.

More information: There's more about COVID-19 facts and rumors at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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