

# Argentine judge orders unproven treatment for COVID patient

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This 2020 photo shows an electric sign in Buenos Aires telling people to stay home, as the city grapples with the coronavirus

An Argentinian judge compelled a private clinic to administer chlorine dioxide, used as a powerful disinfectant, to a coronavirus patient who

died Monday in a case medical doctors have labelled "a scandal."

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other agencies warn that chlorine dioxide, touted as a "miracle cure" online, can be hazardous to human health if consumed.

The stepson of the patient brought a legal bid last Thursday, the day after his mother died of COVID-19, for the compound to be given to her critically ill husband.

A judge granted the request the same day and ordered the Otamendi y Miroli clinic in Buenos Aires to administer the substance, prescribed by the patient's doctor.

The clinic unsuccessfully appealed against the ruling, and gave the man the substance while stressing it would not bear responsibility for any negative outcome.

The patient, a 92-year-old man who was in critical condition from the virus, died Monday, the family's lawyer confirmed.

The FDA has warned that consumption of chlorine dioxide products can "jeopardize a person's health", have no proven effectiveness against COVID-19, and have been known to cause respiratory and liver failure among other ill effects.

The Pan American Health Organization, the Argentine Society of Infectology and the country's National Administration of Drugs, Foods and Medical Devices have also issued warnings against the use of chlorine products to treat COVID-19.

The judge ruled that giving the treatment threatened no "serious harm" to the clinic, but could, conversely, "avoid the worsening" of the patient's

condition.

Medical doctors have lambasted the decision.

## **New therapy**

"For a judge to decide that a doctor has to administer a substance for which there is no scientific evidence is really worrying, especially when it is in intravenous form," said Omar Sued, president of the Argentine Society of Infectology.

"It is not the decision of a judge to administer a medication he does not know to a patient. It is not his role."

Ignacio Maglio, a lawyer for the Argentinian health NGO Fundacion Huesped, said the case amounted to judicial overreach, a "judicial aberration and a scandal."

Chlorine dioxide is used to disinfect medical and laboratory equipment, to treat water at low concentrations, or as a bleach.

The family's lawyer told the television channel C5N that his client will sue the Otamendi clinic as they consider it responsible for the patient's death, because it "delayed the treatment.

"The man died of an in-hospital infection and because of the delay in treatment," the lawyer said.

Argentina announced Monday it would roll out a new COVID-19 therapy, developed by scientists locally, using serum extracted from horses that developed antibodies after being injected with coronavirus proteins.

The serum developed by biotech company Immunova was tested on patients in 18 hospitals for the clinical trial phase, and will now be distributed to hospitals and clinics under a special licence granted by Argentina's ANMAT medicines watchdog.

Immunova director Fernando Goldbaum said the serum helps patients by suppressing viral proliferation, giving the body time to muster its own defensive system.

The developers of the therapy said it reduces mortality by 45 percent.

The Argentine Biological Institute laboratory is producing some 12,000 treatments per month, according to a press statement.

Argentina, with a population of 44 million, has registered more than 1.7 million cases of coronavirus and almost 44,500 deaths.

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