

EU drug agency looking at data on Merck's COVID-19 pill

November 8 2021



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The European Union's medicines agency on Monday began reviewing Merck's COVID-19 treatment pill so that it can swiftly advise national drug authorities in the 27-nation bloc that want to begin using it before it gets official approval.

The European Medicines Agency said in a statement that it will give "EU-

wide recommendations in the shortest possible timeframe to help national authorities decide on possible early use of the medicine, for example, in emergency use settings."

The Amsterdam-based agency will give the recommendations while a comprehensive review of molnupiravir continues ahead of a possible application to market the drug.

Currently most COVID-19 treatments require an IV or injection. Merck's COVID-19 pill is already under review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration after showing strong initial results. On Thursday, [the United Kingdom became the first country to OK it.](#)

In the UK, the pill was approved for adults 18 and older who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have at least one risk factor for developing severe disease, such as obesity or heart disease. Patients with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 would take four pills of the drug twice a day for five days.

In the United States, the FDA has set a public meeting later this month to review molnupiravir. The company reported in September that its drug slashed rates of hospitalization and death by 50%.

The drug targets an enzyme the coronavirus uses to reproduce itself, inserting errors into its [genetic code](#) that slow its ability to spread and take over human cells. That genetic activity has led some independent experts to question whether the [drug](#) could potentially cause mutations leading to birth defects or tumors.

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Citation: EU drug agency looking at data on Merck's COVID-19 pill (2021, November 8)

retrieved 16 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-eu-drug-agency-merck-covid-.html>

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