

S. African regulator approves Merck's anti-COVID pill

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South Africa's health products regulator said on Thursday it had approved the use of Merck's COVID-19 pill for high-risk adults.

The South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) said in a statement it has "authorised, with conditions, the importation of molnupiravir" for an initial period of six months.

The oral treatment is taken within five days of the onset of symptoms and has been shown in a pre-Omicron trial to reduce COVID hospital admissions and deaths by 30 percent among at-risk people.

"The authorisation of molnupiravir for compassionate use offers further therapy in the fight against COVID-19," said the regulator's CEO, Boitumelo Semete-Makokotlela.

With more than 3.6 million diagnosed infections and more than 96,000 deaths, South Africa's pandemic toll is the highest on the continent.

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