

Cyprus allows human COVID-19 medications to be used against deadly virus mutation in cats

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Cats sit in a shelter at the main linear park, in the capital Nicosia, Cyprus, on July 19, 2023. Cyprus' veterinarians association on Friday Aug. 4, 2023 lauded a government decision to allow its stock of human coronavirus medication to be used on cats to fight a local mutation of a feline virus that has killed thousands of animals on the Mediterranean island. Credit: AP Photo/Petros Karadjias, File

Cyprus' veterinarians association on Friday lauded a government decision to allow its stock of human coronavirus medication to be used on cats to fight a local mutation of a feline virus that has killed thousands of animals on the Mediterranean island but can't be transmitted to people.

The association said in a statement that it had petitioned the government for access to the medication at "reasonable prices" from the beginning of this year, when the mutation that causes lethal Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) began to noticeably crop up in the island's cat population.

"We want to assure that we will continue to investigate and control the rise in case of FCov-2023," the association said.

Cyprus Veterinary Services head Hristodoulos Pipis told the state broadcaster Friday that cat owners can receive medication in pill form at 2.5 euros (\$2.74) for each pill at their local veterinarian's office following a formal examination and diagnosis.

The medication's brand name is Lagevrio and its active ingredient is Molnupiravir. Veterinarians Association President Nektaria Ioannou Arsenoglou told The Associated Press that humans cannot contract the mutated feline virus, which isn't related to COVID-19.

Health Ministry senior pharmacist Costas Himonas told the AP that 2,000 packages of the drug will be made available to veterinarians incrementally over the next month. Himonas said there's no risk that current pharmaceutical stocks will be depleted to the point treatment of any COVID-19 surge in people would be compromised.



A cat crosses a pedestrian road at the main linear park, in the capital Nicosia, Cyprus, on July 19, 2023. Cyprus' veterinarians association on Friday Aug. 4, 2023 lauded a government decision to allow its stock of human coronavirus medication to be used on cats to fight a local mutation of a feline virus that has killed thousands of animals on the Mediterranean island. Credit: AP Photo/Petros Karadjias, File

Local animal activists had claimed that the mutation had killed as many as 300,000 cats, but Arsenoglou [says that's an exaggeration](#).

Arsenoglou had said an association survey of 35 veterinary clinics indicated an island-wide total of about 8,000 deaths. Pipis corroborated those findings.

According to Arsenoglou, FIP is nearly always lethal if left untreated, but medication can nurse cats back to health in approximately 85% of cases in both the "wet" and "dry" forms of the illness.

What made FIP treatment difficult was the high price of the medication that activists said put it out of reach of many cat care givers.

Spread through contact with cat feces, the feline coronavirus has been around since 1963. Previous epidemics eventually fizzled out without the use of any medication, Arsenoglou said.

Measures have already been enacted to prevent the export of the mutation through mandatory medical check-ups of all felines destined for adoption abroad.

It's unclear how many feral cats live in Cyprus, where they are generally beloved and have a long history dating back thousands of years.

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