

Some people are taking an anti-parasitic to treat COVID. Here's why that's a bad idea

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Some people itching to get their hands on a COVID-19 cure are putting themselves in danger for taking unprescribed doses of ivermectin, an anti-parasitic drug used to treat diseases such as river blindness or scabies in people and prevent heartworm disease and other infestations in animals.

The drug has been flying off the shelves of farm supply stores and veterinary offices as people, mostly those who refuse to get vaccinated, search for unconventional ways out of the pandemic.

Yet, several federal and international health agencies, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization, have advised against using ivermectin to treat or prevent COVID-19 outside of controlled [clinical trials](#).

That's because taking large unprescribed doses intended for animals can seriously harm your health.

"Let's say it was manufactured for a large horse, but a human takes it, it can create [low blood pressure](#), rapid heart rates, seizures; there are even episodes where you can see layers of your skin fall off. It can damage the liver, and there's vision loss that can be associated," Dr. Shane Speights, site dean at the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine, told KAIT8.

"Data is just not good on ivermectin right now for the treatment of COVID. One of the drug manufacturers even said don't use it," Speights told the outlet. "Right now, the only answer to COVID is to be fully vaccinated."

What do studies reveal about ivermectin and COVID-19?

Misconceptions about the drug's coronavirus healing abilities began to spread when a handful of studies found positive trends in patients after taking the drug, particularly one non-peer reviewed paper that said ivermectin can lower COVID-19 death rates by more than 90%.

That study has since been withdrawn from the research website following reports of plagiarism and data manipulation that "are now under formal investigation."

Separate research published in June last year found that ivermectin reduced the amount of coronavirus in a laboratory dish by 5,000-fold after two days. Some studies showed the drug helped COVID-19 patients recover faster and reduced inflammation, while others showed no benefits or worsening of disease.

But "most of these studies had incomplete

information and significant methodological limitations, which make it difficult to exclude common causes of bias," according to the NIH, including small sample sizes, inconsistencies in the reporting of disease severity and conflicting data as patients received multiple medications at once.

"The way that [ivermectin] works is it actually paralyzes the worm by attacking the nerve and muscle cells," Speights told KAIT8. "COVID is [caused by] a virus. COVID doesn't have nerve or muscle cells, so the mechanism in which the drug works wouldn't work for a virus."

A WHO group of experts analyzed 16 randomized controlled trials including a total of 2,407 inpatients and outpatients with COVID-19 and concluded that evidence of the drug's ability to improve disease outcomes is of "very low certainty." The group didn't look into whether ivermectin can prevent COVID-19.

"We have a hospital with dozens and dozens of patients that have taken ivermectin that is in with COVID pneumonia. I see this every day," Dr. Robin Trotman, an infectious disease specialist in Missouri, told FOX2now. "We have things that work. The [monoclonal antibodies] clearly work, if you're in the hospital steroids clearly work. But this one, I wish it worked, but the evidence is pretty clear."

Incorrectly prescribed ivermectin can cause serious side effects

American comedian, podcast host and UFC commentator Joe Rogan recently claimed the public is turning a cold shoulder to ivermectin's potential role in the pandemic during his June 22 episode on "The Joe Rogan Experience."

One of his guests, Dr. Pierre Kory, introduced as an intensive care unit and lung specialist, said his "dream is that every household has ivermectin in their cupboard. And you take it upon development of first symptom of anything approximating a viral symptom ... even if it's not COVID, it's safe to take it and it's probably effective against that virus."

Ivermectin is not an FDA approved antiviral,

however. It's an anti-parasitic that is used to treat diseases caused by some worms in pill form; topical formulas exist to treat head lice and skin conditions like rosacea.

There is some evidence the drug has an affect on the viruses that cause [dengue fever](#), Zika, HIV and yellow fever, but these studies were done in petri dishes in laboratories, the NIH says. No clinical trials to date have tested ivermectin in people infected with these viruses.

Kory went on to say all side effects to the drug are "considered minor and transient" and that randomized controlled clinical trials—the gold standard for scientific research—are "fraught with error," "not appropriate for a pandemic and it's also a tool that's being used as a disinformation tactic."

But side effects are serious, Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, told WKRN.

"Some of the side effects relate to intestinal disturbance, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, but others are a bit more serious; you can lose your sense of balance, which is not very good," Schaffner told the outlet. "And on occasion, it's actually precipitated seizures and coma. And there have been some people who have died."

Because people are getting their hands on versions of the drug intended for large, heavy animals, health officials say they can be "highly toxic." There are also many inactive ingredients in animal products that aren't evaluated for use in people, the FDA says, or they're in much greater quantities than people can handle.

"In some cases, we don't know how those inactive ingredients will affect how ivermectin is absorbed in the human body."

Ivermectin can also interact with other medications like blood thinners in harmful ways; it's possible to overdose on the drug, too.

For these reasons, health officials have determined there is not enough data to recommend the use of [ivermectin](#) as a treatment for COVID-19.

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