



NEWS RELEASE

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Illinois Department of Public Health Announces COVID-19 Antivirals Available in the Coming Weeks

Antivirals will be by prescription only and can help prevent severe illness

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is announcing two new COVID-19 oral antivirals, [Paxlovid](#) (Pfizer) and [Molnupiravir](#) (Merck), will be available in Illinois later this month. The antivirals are for those with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who are at high risk for becoming severely ill, including hospitalization or death. Both antivirals will be available by prescription only and should be taken as soon as possible after being diagnosed and within five days of the beginning of symptoms. Paxlovid is expected to reduce the risk of hospitalizations by 89% and Molnupiravir by about 30%. Molnupiravir is meant for use when other treatment options are not available.

“These new oral antivirals add new tools to our toolbox to keep people with COVID-19 out of the hospital,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “While vaccination, including boosters, is still the best way to avoid infection and prevent severe illness from COVID-19, these new antivirals given emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration can help treat those who get infected and have a higher risk of becoming severely ill.”

Molnupiravir is not authorized for use in patients who are pregnant or younger than 18 years of age because it may affect bone and cartilage growth. Molnupiravir is intended to be used when other FDA-authorized treatments for COVID-19 are not accessible or are not clinically appropriate. Providers must ensure that patients understand the safety risks of these therapeutics before prescribing them.

In addition to the oral antivirals, people can still receive monoclonal antibody treatment (mAb) to help prevent COVID-19 from progressing to a point where a person needs to be hospitalized. Unlike the new oral antivirals, mAb are administered intravenously (infusion) or through several shots. Both require a prescription.

IDPH is currently working with pharmacies around the state to offer the antivirals. While these antivirals are free from the federal government, they are in limited supply. Illinois will receive a renewed allocation of antivirals every two weeks. Walgreens and Walmart stores are federal pharmacy partners and some of their stores will carry the antivirals, as will other pharmacies. IDPH will provide a list of locations providing antivirals on the IDPH website as soon as participating pharmacies are finalized. More information on COVID-19 Treatment can be found at <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/community-guidance/covid19-treatment.html>.

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