

 **Steroid dexamethasone reduces deaths among patients with severe COVID-19 - trial shows**

   

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 **REUTERS**

Steroid dexamethasone reduces deaths among patients with severe COVID-19 - trial shows

3 hrs ago

   

LONDON, June 16 (Reuters) - A cheap and widely-used steroid called dexamethasone has become the first drug shown to be able to save lives among COVID-19 patients in what scientists said is a "major breakthrough" in the coronavirus pandemic.



© Getty A female doctor examines an X-ray of a patient's lung infected with covid-19 coronavirus, pneumonia. X-rays of light. Fluorography. Checking the lungs in the hospital. Real x-ray of human lungs.

Trial results announced on Tuesday showed dexamethasone, which is used to reduce inflammation in other diseases such as arthritis, reduced death rates by around a third among the most severely ill of COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital.

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The results suggest the drug should immediately become standard care in patients with severe cases of the pandemic disease, said the researchers who led the trials. Britain's health minister said the state-run health service's standard hospital treatment for COVID-19 would include the drug from Tuesday afternoon, adding that Britain had stockpiled 200,000 courses of the treatment.

"This is a (trial) result that shows that if patients who have COVID-19 and are on ventilators or are on oxygen are given dexamethasone, it will save lives, and it will do so at a remarkably low cost," said Martin Landray, an Oxford University professor co-leading the trial, known as the RECOVERY trial.

"It's going to be very hard for any drug really to replace this, given that for less than 50 pounds (\$63.26), you can treat eight patients and save a life," he said in an online briefing.

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reduces it significantly."

"It is a major breakthrough," he said. "Dexamethasone is inexpensive, on the shelf, and can be used immediately to save lives worldwide."

There are currently no approved treatments or vaccines for COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus which has killed more than 431,000 people globally.

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England's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, said Tuesday's announcement was "the most important trial result for COVID-19 so far," adding: "It will save lives around the world."

The RECOVERY trial compared outcomes of around 2,100 patients who were randomly assigned to get the steroid, with those of around 4,300 patients who did not get it. The results suggest that one death would be prevented by treatment with dexamethasone among every eight ventilated COVID-19 patients,

Landray said, and one death would be prevented among every 25 COVID-19 patients that received the drug and are on oxygen.

Among patients with COVID-19 who did not require respiratory support, there was no benefit from treatment with dexamethasone.

"The survival benefit is clear and large in those patients who are sick enough to require oxygen treatment, so dexamethasone should now become standard of care in these patients," Horby said.

The RECOVERY trial was launched in April as a randomized clinical trial to test a range of potential treatments for COVID-19, including low-dose dexamethasone and the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine. The hydroxychloroquine arm was halted earlier this month after Horby and Landray said results showed it was "useless" at treating COVID-19 patients.

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How optimistic are you about the results of this steroid trial to treat COVID-19 patients?

- Very optimistic
- Somewhat optimistic
- Not optimistic at all
- Other / No opinion

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Health

Coronavirus: Dexamethasone proves first life-saving drug

By Michelle Roberts

Health editor, BBC News online

11 minutes ago | 1036



Coronavirus pandemic



A cheap and widely available drug can help save the lives of patients seriously ill with coronavirus.

The low-dose steroid treatment dexamethasone is a major breakthrough in the fight against the deadly virus, UK experts say.

The drug is part of **the world's biggest trial testing existing treatments** to see if they also work for coronavirus.

It cut the risk of death by a third for patients on ventilators. For those on oxygen, it cut deaths by a fifth.

Had the drug had been used to treat patients in the UK from the start of the pandemic, up to 5,000 lives could have been saved, researchers say.

And it could be of huge benefit in poorer countries with high numbers of Covid-19 patients.

The UK government has 200,000 courses of the drug in its stockpile and says the NHS will make dexamethasone available to patients.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said there was a genuine case to celebrate "a remarkable British scientific achievement", adding: "We have taken steps to ensure we have enough supplies, even in the event of a second peak."

Chief Medical Officer for England Prof Chris Whitty said it would save lives around the world.

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About 19 out of 20 patients with coronavirus recover without being admitted to hospital.

Of those who are admitted, most also recover but some may need oxygen or mechanical ventilation.

And these are the high-risk patients dexamethasone appears to help.

The drug is already used to reduce inflammation in a range of other conditions.

And it appears to help stop some of the damage that can happen when the body's immune system goes into overdrive as it tries to fight off coronavirus.

This over-reaction, **a cytokine storm**, can be deadly.

Dexamethasone: Life-saving drug

Patients on ventilators: one life saved for every eight treated



Patients on oxygen: one life saved for every 25 treated



Treatment: Up to ten days



Cost: £5.40 per day

Source: The Recovery Trial



In the trial, led by a team from Oxford University, about 2,000 hospital patients were given dexamethasone and compared with more than 4,000 who were not.

For patients on ventilators, it cut the risk of death from 40% to 28%.

For patients needing oxygen, it cut the risk of death from 25% to 20%.

Chief investigator Prof Peter Horby said: "This is the only drug so far that has been shown to reduce mortality - and it reduces it significantly. It's a major breakthrough."

Lead researcher Prof Martin Landray said the findings suggested one life could be saved for:

- every eight patients on a ventilator
- every 20-25 treated with oxygen

"There is a clear, clear benefit," he said.

"The treatment is up to 10 days of dexamethasone and it costs about £5 per patient.

"So essentially it costs £35 to save a life.

"This is a drug that is globally available."

When appropriate, hospital patients should now be given it without delay, Prof Landray said.

But people should not go out and buy it to take at home.

Dexamethasone does not appear to help people with milder symptoms of coronavirus who do not need help with their breathing.

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The Recovery Trial, running since March, also looked at the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, which has subsequently been **ditched amid concerns** it increases fatalities and heart problems.

The antiviral drug remdesivir, meanwhile, which appears to shorten recovery time for people with coronavirus, is already **being made available on the NHS**.

The first drug proven to cut deaths from Covid-19 is not some new, expensive medicine but an old, cheap-as-chips steroid.

That is something to celebrate because it means patients across the world could benefit immediately.

And that is why the top-line results of this trial have been rushed out - because the implications are so huge globally.

Dexamethasone has been used since the early 1960s to treat a wide range of conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis and asthma.

Half of all Covid patients who require a ventilator do not survive, so cutting that risk by a third would have a huge impact.

The drug is given intravenously in intensive care and in tablet form for less seriously ill patients.

So far, the only other drug proven to benefit Covid patients is remdesivir, which has been used for Ebola.

That has been shown to reduce the duration of coronavirus symptoms from 15 days to 11.

But the evidence was not strong enough to show whether it reduced mortality.

Unlike dexamethasone, remdesivir is a new drug with limited supplies and a price has yet to be announced.