



Oral treatments for COVID-19

19 July 2022

What are oral treatments?

Oral treatments for COVID-19 are medications taken by mouth as tablets or capsules for eligible people who have tested positive to COVID-19. The advantage of these medications is that many people will be able to receive treatment for COVID-19 in their own homes without the need to travel to hospital for treatment as an inpatient.

How and when should the oral treatments be taken?

The medications are taken as tablets or capsules every 12 hours for 5 days within 5 days from when symptoms start or as soon as possible after testing positive for COVID-19.

Who is eligible for oral treatments?

People aged 18 years and older

If you test positive for COVID-19, you may be eligible for antiviral oral treatments if you are 18 years or older and are moderately to severely immunocompromised.

Moderately or severely immunocompromised conditions include:

- blood cancer or some red blood cell disorders (thalassemia, sickle cell disease)
- transplant recipient
- primary or acquired (HIV) immunodeficiency
- chemotherapy or whole-body radiotherapy in the last 3 months
- high dose corticosteroids or pulse corticosteroid therapy in the last 3 months
- immunosuppressive treatments in the last 3 months
- rituximab in the last 12 months
- cerebral palsy or down syndrome
- congenital heart disease
- living with disability with multiple conditions and/or frailty.

Older people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

If you are an older person or an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and test positive for COVID-19, you may be eligible for antiviral oral treatments if you are:

- 70 years or older, regardless of risk factors, and with or without symptoms
- 50 years or older with **2** additional risk factors (listed below)
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 30 years or older and with **2** risk factors (listed below).

Risk factors:

- living in residential aged care
- living with disability with multiple conditions and/or frailty (but not limited to living in supported accommodation)
- neurological conditions like stroke or dementia and demyelinating conditions e.g. multiple sclerosis, Guillain-Barre Syndrome
- chronic respiratory conditions including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), moderate or severe asthma
- obesity or diabetes (type I or II requiring medication)
- heart failure, coronary artery disease, cardiomyopathies
- kidney failure or cirrhosis
- living remotely with reduced access to higher level healthcare.

These medications are not suitable for everyone, so talk to your doctor to check your eligibility.

How and where do I get an oral treatment?

You need a prescription to receive oral COVID-19 treatments. You can get them from pharmacies with a prescription.

Are oral antiviral treatments subsidised?

Eligible people can access subsidised oral antiviral treatments through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme with a prescription from an authorised prescriber, for example a doctor.

People who test positive for COVID-19 but do NOT have a Medicare card can contact a GP respiratory clinic for advice regarding treatment options.

Who should not take oral treatments?

Oral treatments are not recommended for use in women who are pregnant or breastfeeding – making it even more important that pregnant and breastfeeding women be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Some treatments are not safe to use alongside certain other medications and should not be used in people with severe kidney or liver disease.

Oral treatments and fertility

If you are prescribed an oral treatment for COVID-19 you must take extra care about using contraception as the treatment may affect how your birth control works. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about different contraceptives and what is best for you.

Vaccination and oral treatments

These treatments are not intended to be used as a substitute for vaccination against COVID-19.

Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself, your loved ones, and the wider community from COVID-19.

Approval

All medicines in Australia must be approved for use by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA are the scientists and medical experts who regulate and approve all vaccines, medicines and other medical products for use in Australia. The TGA has strict standards for allowing medicines to be used in Australia. They only approve medicines that are safe and effective. This includes the COVID-19 oral treatments.

More information

For COVID-19 information and support in your language, call the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 and select option 8 for free interpreting assistance.