

# Medicines used for COVID-19



# Are there medicines for COVID-19 and how do they work?

In Australia, there are medicines for COVID-19.

COVID-19 medicines work by stopping viruses from entering your body or from multiplying inside it. With less virus in your body, you have a lower chance of getting worse.

## How can they help me?

You could be given a COVID-19 medicine if you cannot have a COVID-19 vaccination and/or you're at high risk of getting severely sick because of your medical condition or age.

These medicines stop COVID-19 from becoming serious. They help to reduce your chances of getting very sick and needing to go to hospital.

The COVID-19 medicine should be started **within the first 5 days of your symptoms**. The medicine works best if you start taking them as soon as you find out you have COVID-19.

If you are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations and you don't have any other health conditions or risk factors, **you may not need COVID-19 medicines** if you get COVID-19. This is because your body has enough protection from the virus and your symptoms may not be severe.

## Can I take COVID-19 medicines?

If you test positive for COVID-19 on a RAT or PCR test, you may be eligible to take COVID-19 medicines if you are:

- 70 years and older with or without symptoms or risk factors
- 50 years and older with 2 additional risk factors
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 30 years and older and with 2 additional risk factors
- 18 years and older and are immunocompromised.

To know more about risk factors, visit the [Antivirals for COVID-19](#) web page.

## How do I get a COVID-19 medicine?

Your doctor can only prescribe these medicines after you test positive for COVID-19 and if this is the right treatment for you.

- It's important to speak to your doctor, over the phone or video call (telehealth), when you test positive, so you can get the medicine right away.
- Remember, the antivirals work best if you take them within 5 days of your symptoms starting. COVID-19 medicines are available in pharmacies and hospitals.
- Your GP can send an electronic prescription to a smart phone or to an email address, so that you, your family, friend, or support person can get the medicines from the chemist.

## Is it safe to take COVID-19 medicines?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved the medicines which means they are considered safe and effective.

We are still learning about this medicine, but they seem to be safe and likely to help when you have COVID-19.

In research, people given this medicine were more likely to feel better than those who did not take it. The medicine stopped some people who had COVID-19 from getting very sick and needing to go to hospital.

## What do I need to know before taking COVID-19 medicines?

COVID-19 medicines are not for everyone. Your doctor will check carefully if this is safe for you. They will look at your age, the medicines that you take, your health condition, and your vaccination status.

You or your carer **must give your consent** before the medicine is given to you.

It is very important for you to let your doctor know:

- your medical condition (any or all the sickness that you have, for example, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc).
- your allergies
- other medicines you are taking (including vitamins, pain killers, over-the-counter medicine, etc).
- if you have a hard time swallowing
- if you are pregnant or if you or your partner are planning to be pregnant
- if you are breastfeeding
- what vaccinations you have had and when you had them – you may not need the treatment if you are fully vaccinated for COVID-19
- when you plan to get the COVID-19 vaccination and booster shots.

## Are there different types of COVID-19 medicines?

There are two groups of medicines to treat or prevent COVID-19—antivirals and monoclonal antibodies (MABs).

The **antiviral medicines** work by stopping viruses in your body from copying. With less copies of the virus in your body, your chance of getting sick is lower.

**MABs** work by sticking to the COVID-19 virus. This stops the virus from entering human cells in the body and can prevent people from becoming very sick.

The medicines can be in the form of tablets (taken by mouth), infusion (IV drip) and injection (in your arm).

These are the approved brands for use in Australia:

### **Antivirals**

- Paxlovid® (also known as nirmatrelvir + ritonavir)
- Lagevrio® (also known as molnupiravir)
- Veklury® (also known as remdesivir)

### **Monoclonal antibodies (MAB)**

- Xevudy® (also known as sotrovimab)
- Evusheld® (also known as tixagevimab and cilgavimab)
- Ronapreve® (casirivimab + imdevimab)

# How do I take the COVID-19 medicines and how long should I take them?

You can take COVID-19 medicines at home or in hospital.

These are the ways to take them:

## **Tablet or capsules (taken at home)**

- take them for 5 full days even if you feel better before the end of 5 days
- swallow the tablet or capsule whole with a glass of water
- don't chew, break or crush the tablet or capsule
- you can take them before or after a meal.

## **IV drip (given in hospital or healthcare clinic)**

- given 1 to 5 days (depending on how sick you are)
- administered by a nurse
- given through your vein (IV drip) or arm (injection)
- this will take about 30 minutes to 2 hours (IV drip) to finish
- you need to stay in hospital or clinic for at least 1 hour to make sure you don't have an allergic reaction.

## **Injection (given in hospital or healthcare clinic)**

- 2 to 4 separate injections at one given time
- administered by a nurse
- given through your upper arm, upper thighs or buttocks
- you need to stay in hospital or clinic for at least 1 hour to make sure you don't have an allergic reaction.

## What are the side effects of COVID-19 medicines?

All medicines have side effects. Sometimes they are serious, but most of the time they are not. It can also be hard to tell if the side effects are from the COVID-19 medicine or if they are symptoms of COVID-19.

The more common reactions are:

- loose or runny poo
- feeling like you might throw up
- dizziness
- headache
- muscle ache
- rashes, redness in the skin, hives
- changes in taste
- high blood pressure.

Tell your nurse or doctor if you have these reactions.

If you feel pain in your chest or your heart is beating fast or slow, you need to call **Triple Zero (000)** and ask for an ambulance to take you to the nearest hospital.

## Do I need to isolate if I am taking COVID-19 medicines?

You need to isolate if you are taking COVID-19 medicines because this means you have COVID-19.

It is important for you to follow these 5 steps to protect yourself and others.

1. Stay home for 7 days
2. Tell the people you live with that you have COVID-19
3. Monitor your symptoms.
4. Get the things you need delivered to you like food and medicine
5. Tell your carer/support person that you have COVID-19 and to get tested if they have symptoms.

If you have minor symptoms and are not sure what medical care you need, you call:

- your doctor
- the National Coronavirus Helpline **(1800 020 080)**
- or **13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)**.

Call **TRIPLE ZERO (000)** if you develop severe symptoms. Ask for an ambulance to take you to the nearest hospital.



## How much do COVID-19 medicines cost?

You may need to pay some of the cost of the medicine. You may also need to pay for your doctor's appointment to get the prescription.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about how much the medicine will cost. You may get the medicine at a reduced price if you are eligible under the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS). This means concession card holders can get COVID-19 medicines at the concession price rate.

## Will I still get COVID-19 after taking COVID-19 medicines?

Some people may still get sick with COVID-19 after they complete their medication.

It is important for you to watch your symptoms. If you start to feel unwell or your symptoms are getting worse, call 13 HEALTH (**13 43 25 84**).

If your symptoms become serious, like difficulty breathing, call Triple Zero (**000**) and ask for an ambulance.

## Do I still need to get vaccinated for COVID-19?

COVID-19 medicines are not a substitute for vaccination.

Vaccination is still the **best** way to protect yourself and your family against COVID-19, but protection weakens over time.

That is why it is important to have a booster shot 3 months after your second COVID-19 vaccination. The booster shot will give you more protection from the virus.

## When can I get vaccinated?

You should wait 3 months from the time you recover from COVID-19 before you get your next COVID-19 vaccination. A longer gap between being sick and getting vaccinated can give you more protection from getting sick again.

## Where can I find support or more information?

- **Call Triple Zero (000)** – if you have serious symptoms, like difficulty breathing
- **National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080)** – for 24 hour information about COVID-19 (press 5)
- **Healthdirect (1800 022 222)** – for 24 hour health advice
- **Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)** – if you start to feel unwell or your symptoms are worse but not serious
- [\*\*Disability Gateway \(1800 643 787\)\*\*](#) – for support and vaccine information
- [\*\*Medication for treating COVID-19. Health Direct\*\*](#) – for information on approved medicines for COVID-19
- [\*\*COVID-19 medicines information sheet for people with disability\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Webinar on COVID-19 treatments\*\*](#) for people with disability