

Public urged to sign-up to world-first COVID-19 antiviral study

- Recruitment drive backed by charities including Kidney Care UK, Cystic Fibrosis Trust, Diabetes UK and the British Liver Trust as antivirals help protect most vulnerable from hospital
- At least 6,000 more participants needed as soon as possible so the life-saving treatments can be rolled out more widely
- People can sign up here: www.panoramictrial.org

Adults over the age of 50 or with an underlying health condition who test positive for COVID-19 are being urged to sign up for a world-first COVID-19 study which is providing life-saving antivirals to thousands of people.

The government and leading charities, including Kidney Care UK, Cystic Fibrosis Trust, Diabetes UK and the British Liver Trust, are calling on at least 6,000 more participants to come forward for these cutting-edge treatments through the PANORAMIC study. This is so that expert scientists can understand more about how to deploy these treatments in the NHS more widely later in the year – including who would benefit most from receiving antiviral treatments for COVID-19.

Antivirals are medicines which can be swallowed as a tablet to help treat people with COVID-19 infections to reduce the risk of hospitalisations and death. Molnupiravir, which is currently being deployed through the study, has shown to reduce this for at risk, non-hospitalised adults with mild to moderate COVID-19 by 30% – potentially saving thousands of lives once the drugs are available to the NHS.

Anyone over the age of 50 or between 18 to 49 with an underlying health condition can sign up to the study as soon as they receive a positive PCR or lateral flow test result. They need to be experiencing COVID-19 symptoms that began in the last five days to be eligible to enrol.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The vaccines are critical as a first line of defence, but antivirals form a vital part of our approach as we learn to live with COVID by preventing the most vulnerable from being hospitalised.

If you're eligible, please step forward for the PANORAMIC trial and play your part in a vital mission – helping us to learn more about medicines which could save thousands of lives.

The UK-wide study, run by the University of Oxford and supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), launched at the start of December 2021 and currently has around 4,600 trial participants signed up,

but needs thousands more to sign up as soon as possible to gather the data necessary. This will ensure medical experts can learn more about the potential benefits these treatments bring to vaccinated patients, and will help the NHS to develop plans for rolling out the antivirals to further patients later this year.

It is open to anyone living in the UK who meets the following criteria:

- Have received a positive PCR or lateral flow test for COVID-19 and feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 that started in the last five days; and
- are aged 50 and over, or 18 to 49 years old with an underlying medical condition that can increase the risk of developing severe COVID-19.

While vaccines remain the most important first line of defence against the virus, antivirals are used after someone contracts the virus to slow it down, make symptoms less severe and complications less common.

The antiviral, molnupiravir, that is part of the PANORAMIC trial, was granted approval for use by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority (MHRA) in November 2021, and so far no unexpected safety findings have been reported in clinical trials.

The government, through the Antivirals Taskforce, has procured 4.98 million courses of antivirals – including 2.23 million courses of molnupiravir and 2.75 million courses of PF-07321332/ritonavir.

Professor Sir Jonathan Van-Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, said:

If you're eligible for PANORAMIC please give some serious consideration to taking part. This will help us decide how to use COVID-19 antiviral drugs for many years to come.

Eddie Gray, Chair of the Antivirals Taskforce, said:

Antivirals are a hugely important addition to our response to COVID-19 and we have secured access to two important products for NHS patients.

Getting people enrolled onto this study is vital, not just in protecting the most vulnerable now, but in ensuring we can deploy these medicines more widely as soon as possible.

Case studies

Pippa Erskine, double lung transplant recipient who lives with Cystic Fibrosis, accessed antivirals after testing positive for COVID-19 at the start of January. Pippa said:

Even after three vaccines, testing positive for COVID-19 after avoiding the virus for more than 18 months was worrying. Knowing antivirals would help ease my symptoms and help prevent potential complications was a huge relief.

With restrictions easing, it's so important that those vulnerable to COVID-19 have the best possible chance of staying protected against the virus and, most importantly, staying out of hospital. Antivirals are essential to this.

I'd urge anyone eligible for the trial to put themselves forward to help make antivirals more widely available, and to protect themselves and others.

Mr Harkishan Mistry, age 58, is General Secretary of Bradford Hindu Council said:

After testing positive for COVID-19 last Monday on a lateral flow, a friend recommended I look into the antivirals trial. As I'm over 50 and was experiencing symptoms such as sore throat, headache, and achiness, I was eligible and was selected to receive the antiviral treatment by Monday afternoon.

The whole process was so simple – a courier delivered the capsules the next morning and I began taking the course straight away. While I'm still testing positive and remain in isolation, my symptoms eased daily and I feel much better.

I'd really recommend anyone who's eligible for the trial to sign up – why would you not if we can help others and ease pressure on the NHS.

Hazel, a pharmacist from Whitley Bay, got COVID-19 early in January and so signed up to the trial immediately to help find antiviral medicines to treat the virus. Hazel said:

I enrolled online when I got COVID-19 and the process was really simple. I got a call from a nurse right away who took me through everything and since then I've just had to keep a short online daily diary which takes less than a minute to do.

The process really couldn't be simpler, and it's so exciting to be part of this world leading effort to find a treatment for COVID-19.

Both as someone who got COVID-19 and as a pharmacist, I know the damage this virus can do and would urge anyone eligible to visit the website and really consider getting involved as it could save lives.

Stakeholder quotes

Fiona Loud, Policy Director at Kidney Care UK, said:

We welcome the development and provision of antiviral treatments for people who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

This trial is one of the ways to make them more widely available so we would like to encourage everyone who is eligible, including those with kidney disease, to take part in this study.

While we continue to encourage people to take up the offer of vaccinations, antiviral treatments are going to be a vital tool to give more protection to people who are most at risk from COVID-19, including those with kidney disease.

Vanessa Hebditch, Director of Policy at the British Liver Trust, said:

The introduction of new treatments for COVID-19 for the most vulnerable is an important and welcome development in the tackling of the pandemic. People with liver disease and liver transplant recipients are among the highest risk from COVID-19 and have less immunity from vaccines so treatments are vital to reduce their risk of hospitalisation should they catch the virus.

We urge people living with a liver condition to consider signing up for trial to protect themselves and ensure that more people can access these treatments.

David Ramsden, chief executive of Cystic Fibrosis Trust, said:

It is vital for that we continue to focus on the development and evaluation of new treatments for COVID-19.

This is a really important study and we would encourage all eligible people with cystic fibrosis to get involved.