

# UK secures millions more antivirals to help fight Omicron

- Monumental deals have been accelerated to combat the Omicron variant and protect patients
- Government urges all over 50s and most vulnerable to sign up to the national study as soon as they test positive for COVID-19

Millions more cutting-edge antiviral treatments for COVID-19 have been secured for NHS patients as the UK Government signs two new contracts to help tackle Omicron.

The significant new deals have been accelerated following the emergence of the Omicron variant to protect vulnerable people over the coming months. The move will help reduce hospitalisations and therefore ease pressures on the NHS.

Antivirals are treatments used to either treat those who are infected with a virus or sometimes protect exposed individuals from becoming infected. They target the virus at an early stage, preventing progression to more severe, or even critical, symptoms.

The two new contracts are for 1.75 million additional courses of Merck Sharp and Dohme's (MSD) molnupiravir (Lagevrio®) and 2.5 million additional courses of PF-07321332/ritonavir (Paxlovid™) from Pfizer which will be available from early next year and are both expected to be effective against Omicron.

The 4.25 million courses are in addition to the procurement of 480,000 courses of molnupiravir and 250,000 courses of PF-07321332/ritonavir announced in October this year.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our COVID-19 booster programme continues at unparalleled pace and it's vital we further bolster our national response to the virus by ensuring access to the world's best treatments too.

This is a mammoth deal for the UK Government and for patients across the country that are set to benefit from these antivirals over the coming months.

If you're aged 50 and over or have an underlying health condition and test positive for COVID-19 – sign up to the study as soon as you can and take advantage of this remarkable treatment.

Molnupiravir is already being rolled out to hundreds of patients through the national study PANORAMIC, run by the University of Oxford in close collaboration with GP hubs. The government is urging everyone aged 50 and

over, or between 18 to 49 with an underlying health condition, to [sign up to the trial](#) if they test positive for COVID-19.

Last week, deployment of the antiviral to those at highest risk began outside of the clinical trial – for example, people who are immunocompromised or cancer patients – after they've tested positive. And as of Monday the antibody treatment sotrovimab (Xevudy™) was also being made available to this group of patients.

Molnupiravir has shown in clinical trials to reduce the risk of hospitalisation or death for at-risk, non-hospitalised adults with mild to moderate COVID-19 by 30%. PF-07321332/ritonavir reduced the relative risk of COVID-19-associated hospitalisation or death by 89% in those who received treatment within three days of symptoms appearing.

Should PF-07321332 be approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), it will also be deployed through the PANORAMIC study as quickly as possible.

The study was launched to allow medical experts to gather further data on 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 next year.

For treatment access outside of the study, those in the highest risk group will be informed by the NHS if they have a condition that will make them eligible to receive these treatments, should they test positive for COVID-19.

Chair of the Antivirals Taskforce Eddie Gray said:

Both antivirals in our current portfolio could be vital tools against Omicron – with current evidence showing they will be effective against the variant.

The Antivirals Taskforce will continue its work to ensure vulnerable people who test positive for COVID-19 can rapidly access these medicines.

Signing up to the study is a simple and easy way you can protect yourself once you contract COVID-19 – if eligible, please sign up as soon as you test positive.

The Antivirals Taskforce will continue to look at a number of further treatment options, spanning a range of different antiviral mechanisms. Alongside the work of the Therapeutics Taskforce, this will ensure as many people as possible can be protected from COVID-19, future variants and other future diseases.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the UK has proven itself to be a world leader in identifying and rolling out effective treatments for COVID-19 – including the world's first treatment, dexamethasone, which has saved over a

million lives worldwide.