

Oral treatment for COVID-19: The game changer

Written by David R. Scrase, M.D. Acting cabinet secretary for New Mexico Department of Health
Friday, 10 June 2022 05:40



There have been a lot of game changers since COVID-19 began - including the virus itself, which has completely upended our way of life, across the globe. For two years we have been in a dead heat, racing against emerging variants, lining our tool kit with the most successful vaccine in human history, collectively postponing big life events to save the very lives we are meant to be celebrating...and so much more. How are we faring in this race? A look back helps define where we are, how far we have come, and why what we do now matters.

The first game changer and the most prolific is of course the ground-breaking [mRNA](#) vaccine. A remarkable medical wonder, years in the making, released seemingly overnight to prevent millions of hospitalizations and lives lost. If you haven't gotten yours, please make sure to get your vaccine and stay up-to-date on your boosters.

Second, came at-home testing: the free, convenient way for everyone to easily confirm within minutes instead of days, whether they are COVID positive. In addition to its vital role in mitigating viral spread, the swift response time gives a third game changer its best chance at leveling the field: the mighty, the powerful, the must-be-taken-within-a- [5-day-window](#) pill that will likely keep you out of the hospital, and may even save your life: the oral treatment.

Oral treatments, taken from the convenience of home, reduce our chance of severe outcomes from COVID-19, including hospitalization and death, by nearly 90%. What more needs to be said? But wait, there is more: oral treatments can prevent our hospitals from being overrun during surges. I'm sure we can all agree the global medical staff has paid their collective dues. Now we can pay it forward, by easily treating it with prescribed medication. That's a game changer.

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You might be saying, sounds good...but who gets these oral treatments? Just those at risk for hospitalization or death? Well, yes and no. Yes, of course those at increased risk for severe outcomes qualify for oral treatment...but what constitutes a [high risk individual](#) ?

You may be surprised to know: Anyone who is over 65, overweight, pregnant, has asthma, is a smoker, diabetic, and . So in fact, that means the majority of us here in New Mexico. The more qualifying conditions a person has, the more likely they'll suffer severe outcomes. If this is you, the time is now to speak with your doctor about a plan for oral treatments, or to make one.

Great. So how do we all get started? A positive test result is required, along with any COVID-19 symptom, even fatigue.

A few options: The Department of Health launched a resource to help you [find a treatment](#) . Test-to-treat locations offer both testing and treatment during the same visit. Since treatment needs to start within the 5-day window of the first symptom, the value of one-stop shopping goes beyond convenience.

Another is at-home tests, quick results mean you'll have the best chance at seeking treatment fast. If you don't already have a handful of these tests at your house now, order some today at findatestnm.org

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I've said it before and it bears repeating: as tired as we are of COVID-19, it is not tired of us. And it's not done with us. But in this fight against such a formidable and evasive viral contender, there is good news: by using these game changing tools, we become the game changer ourselves!

You have that power, I urge you to use it. Like one of my patients did Memorial Day 2022. She had a positive home test, is over 65 years old, and has some other risk factors, too. She texted me while I was out with my wife on a bike ride and soon after we returned home I called her, verified her test result, symptoms, and risk factors, and sent a prescription for oral treatment to her pharmacy. As I write this, she's already taken her first dose.

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And I'd like to thank all of you for your continued efforts to safeguard your fellow New Mexicans. I will continue to share all I can about the advancements we're making, and the tools we have to protect ourselves, our communities, our hospitals, and each other. I believe the best is yet to come. COVID may not be over, but we are stronger than ever and can reach that day in the hopefully not too distant future, together.

The simple take away: COVID-19? Get Vaccinated. Get Tested. Get Treated (right away).

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