



T: 0131-244 2823
M: 07808 727760
E: alison.strath@gov.scot

To:
Medical Directors
Directors of Pharmacy

Action: for cascade to:
Relevant acute care clinical teams
General practitioners
Community pharmacists

9th November 2021

Dear Colleague,

Covid-19 Antivirals Update

On 4 November 2021, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) granted a conditional marketing authorisation to the first oral antiviral for COVID-19, molnupiravir (brand name: Lagevrio).

The UK Government has signed a supply agreement with Merck Sharp and Dohme (MSD) for 480,000 patient courses of molnupiravir. The first supplies are expected to be available in December.

Molnupiravir is a ribonucleoside analogue, which inhibits viral RNA replication. It has been shown in a company-sponsored clinical trial to reduce the relative risk of hospitalisation or death by approximately 50% in at-risk, non-hospitalised adult patients with mild-to-moderate COVID-19. The participants in the clinical trial were unvaccinated.

Antivirals are most effective when administered early in infection by preventing progression to more severe, or even critical, symptoms. Molnupiravir should be administered as soon as possible after a diagnosis of COVID-19 has been made and within 5 days of symptom onset.

The intention is to initially deploy molnupiravir to NHS patients through a UK-wide clinical trial funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). This approach will enable collection of additional data including information on the effectiveness of molnupiravir in vaccinated patients in order to help inform decisions on the wider deployment and use of antivirals. Work is underway to identify one or more clinical trial sites within Scotland.

Following the approach used for other COVID-19 treatment options, a UK-wide access policy will be agreed by the four Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) to help ensure the most clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 are prioritised for access. The clinical access policy is expected to be agreed before the end of November and will also confirm whether there are any scenarios in which molnupiravir will be recommended for use outside of the clinical trial.



The UK Government has also secured 250,000 patient courses of a second oral antiviral, PF-07321332/ritonavir from Pfizer. This has a different mechanism of action to molnupiravir. This antiviral is not expected to be available until February 2022 at the earliest.

I hope this information is helpful in order to respond to any initial queries you may receive from members of the public.

Yours sincerely,



Alison Strath FRPharmS
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer