

# Medicines to treat COVID-19

September 2022

COVID-19 antiviral medicines can help people who are at risk of becoming very sick with COVID-19.

## Taking antiviral medicines to treat COVID-19

COVID-19 antiviral medicines are available to treat eligible people who have tested positive or are a household contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 at home.

You must start taking COVID-19 medicines within the first five days of getting COVID-19 symptoms.

When taken early in COVID-19 illness, these medicines have been proven to reduce hospitalisation and death.

These medicines are free for eligible people with COVID-19. If eligible, you may be able to get a prescription from your usual healthcare provider, or the medicine may be supplied without a prescription from some pharmacies.

If you get COVID-19, you must self-isolate so you will need to arrange to have the medicine delivered to you by friends, whānau or by other means. Some pharmacies can deliver the medicine.

More information can be found here about [how to self-isolate](https://tinyurl.com/2ymszvwn) (<https://tinyurl.com/2ymszvwn>)

## Eligibility for COVID-19 medicines

People with a high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are eligible for treatment with COVID-19 medicines.

**Please note:** These medicines may not be suitable for everyone, even if they meet eligibility criteria. Please consult with your GP or pharmacy to see if you are eligible or if this medicine is appropriate for you.

To be eligible for COVID-19 antiviral medication you must:

- have symptoms and have tested positive for COVID-19; or
- have symptoms and be a household contact of a person with COVID-19.

One of the following must also apply:

- you have a severely weakened immune system;
- you have Down syndrome;
- you have sickle cell disease;
- you have previously been admitted to an intensive care unit because of COVID-19 and have tested positive again
- you are aged 65 or over;
- you are of Māori or Pacific ethnicity and aged 50 or over;
- you are aged 50 or over and haven't completed your primary course of vaccination (at least two doses);
- you have three or more [high risk medical conditions](https://tinyurl.com/4n9sua9d) (<https://tinyurl.com/4n9sua9d>)

## Types of COVID-19 medicines available

Three COVID-19 antiviral medicines are available to treat eligible people with COVID-19 in the community:

- nirmatrelvir with ritonavir (branded as Paxlovid);
- molnupiravir (branded as Lagevrio);
- remdesivir, an infusion treatment (branded as Veklury).

### Paxlovid

Paxlovid consists of 2 medicines (nirmatrelvir and ritonavir) that you take together. They reduce the amount of virus in your body. You take Paxlovid tablets for 5 days.

It is important to tell your usual healthcare provider or pharmacist of any illnesses, and medicines, herbal remedies or supplements you are taking. They may affect the safety of Paxlovid.

If you were given an advance prescription for Paxlovid, you may still need a clinical assessment before getting these medicines. Visit Health Navigator for information about Paxlovid, including how to take it, what to think about before you take it, and possible side effects.

There is information below about the possible return of COVID-19 symptoms soon after finishing treatment with Paxlovid.

Take either of the following two links for [more information about Paxlovid | Health Navigator](https://tinyurl.com/2prskbbw) (<https://tinyurl.com/2prskbbw>)

## **Molnupiravir**

Molnupiravir (Lagevrio) is a medicine that reduces the amount of virus in your body. You take molnupiravir capsules for 5 days.

Visit Health Navigator for information about molnupiravir, including how to take it, what to think about before you take it, and possible side effects.

Take either of the following two links for [more information about molnupiravir | Health Navigator](https://tinyurl.com/56ap3peb) (<https://tinyurl.com/56ap3peb>)

## **Remdesivir**

Remdesivir (Veklury) is a medicine that reduces the amount of virus in your body. It is given once a day, usually for 3 days. It is given by a slow injection into your vein (called an intravenous infusion), over 30 to 120 minutes. This option is mostly only available in hospital but may be available via some community providers as well, such as rural settings

Visit Health Navigator for information about remdesivir, including when it is given and possible side effects.

Take either of the following two links for [more information about remdesivir | Health Navigator](https://tinyurl.com/2p9mb2pm) (<https://tinyurl.com/2p9mb2pm>)

## If you test positive for COVID-19

### Getting a prescription from your general practice (GP)

If you think you may be eligible, talk to your usual general practice (GP) by phone about getting a prescription for the COVID-19 medicine that is right for you. They will help you work out if you are suitable for antiviral medicine. It will depend on several factors, including your age, ethnicity, other health conditions and vaccination status.

### Getting the medicine from a pharmacy

If you think you may be eligible, you may be able to get COVID-19 medicines without a prescription from your local pharmacy. Talk to your local pharmacy by phone to see if that is right for you. The pharmacist will carry out a clinical assessment and check your eligibility before providing the medicine.

Pharmacies supplying antivirals can be found on [Healthpoint](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz) (<https://www.healthpoint.co.nz>)

A prescription is required at [these pharmacies](https://tinyurl.com/yzwyuf4y) (<https://tinyurl.com/yzwyuf4y>)

No prescription is required at [these pharmacies](https://tinyurl.com/yz9vyjun) (<https://tinyurl.com/yz9vyjun>)

## **Advance prescriptions for COVID-19 medicines**

If you are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19, you may be able to get a prescription from your usual general practice before you get sick. This means the pharmacy will have the prescription ready to use if you become unwell. If you test positive and develop symptoms, you can then arrange to have the medicine delivered by friends or family, or by other means, such as your pharmacy in some instances.

Talk to your healthcare provider to see if getting a prescription before you get unwell is right for you. You cannot get an advance prescription to take overseas in case you get COVID-19 while travelling.

For some people, symptoms may return after completing a course of Paxlovid. This is known as Paxlovid rebound.

People experiencing Paxlovid rebound do not appear to get severely ill. Symptoms are usually mild and typically resolve within three days.

It is normal for some people recovering from COVID-19 to have symptoms that come and go for some time, regardless of whether they have taken antiviral medicines.

You should stay home and recover until 24 hours after you no longer have symptoms if:

- your symptoms return after finishing the five-day course of Paxlovid,
- and it's 28 days or less since you first got symptoms or tested positive.

There is no need to take another course of Paxlovid if your symptoms return during this time.

At these links you can read information [about getting reinfected with COVID-19](https://tinyurl.com/2uw8t7dh) (<https://tinyurl.com/2uw8t7dh>)

If you have an underlying health condition or your symptoms are getting worse, call Healthline on [0800 358 5453](tel:08003585453) or your usual healthcare provider.

**End of information about: Medicines to treat COVID-19**