

Ivermectin not recommended for COVID-19

A drug typically used to treat and eliminate a variety of parasitic worms in horses and cows is making headlines across the country. A conspiracy theory that has been circulating in the U.S. has led people to believe that this drug, known as ivermectin, can also be used to treat and prevent COVID-19 – although it has not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for this purpose.

Dr. Bill Walsh, chief medical officer at OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Evergreen Park, Illinois, urges community members to avoid ivermectin altogether for treatment and prevention of COVID-19.

Bill Walsh, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center

“Ivermectin is a medication that was developed to treat parasites. It is essentially like an antibiotic for parasites and has been studied against parasites like scabies or lice – which are parasites you might be familiar with. It has no known effect against a bacteria and it has no known effect against a virus.” (:27)

Because ivermectin is not approved to be used to fight or prevent COVID-19, medical experts everywhere are asking people to check with their healthcare provider before administering ivermectin.

Bill Walsh, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center

“We do want the patient to be involved in treatment choices, but the standard model of medical care in this country is the patient who is experiencing symptoms comes to see the doctor, the doctor evaluates the symptoms, may do some diagnostic tests, and determines a diagnosis. Then, the doctor recommends treatment.” (:22)

Bill Walsh, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center

“If you go to the doctor with a broken ankle, they are not going to recommend you take a pill. They may recommend surgery or a cast and crutches, but they are not going to recommend a pill for that treatment. That is the simplest way I can explain to please get the evaluation of a physician and the recommended treatment.” (:24)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a recent study examining trends in ivermectin dispensing from outpatient retail pharmacies in the U.S. during the pandemic showed an increase from an average of 3,600 prescriptions per week at the start of the pandemic to now more than 88,000 prescriptions in the week ending on August 13, 2021. Farmers who are actually in need of ivermectin for their livestock are having trouble finding it as it flies off the shelves.

The FDA warns that even the levels of ivermectin approved for human use can interact with other medications such as blood-thinners, and it is possible to even overdose on ivermectin. An overdose can cause serious problems that require immediate medical attention, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, low blood pressure, allergic reactions like itching and hives, dizziness, problems with balance, seizures, coma, and even death.

A recent CDC health alert warns that this is already happening in the U.S. – as adverse effects associated with ivermectin misuse and overdose are increasing, and there has been a rise in calls to poison control centers reporting overdoses and other adverse effects.

For those interested in learning about the approved ways to treat COVID-19, the FDA has created a special emergency program for possible coronavirus therapies, the [Coronavirus Treatment Acceleration Program](#) (CTAP). Dr. Walsh reminds community members that there are approved treatments for COVID-19 – and to discuss any treatment plans with your doctor before trying them on your own.

Bill Walsh, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center

“There are outpatient treatments such as monoclonal antibodies that has been tested and proven to work in patients who are not in need of hospitalization. There is a medication called Remdesivir, which is a treatment for people who do need hospitalization. And, of course, the safe and very effective vaccines are good at helping to prevent you from getting sick. Taking medications that are not prescribed by a doctor to treat COVID-19 because you’ve heard about it on social media is not a safe way to treat yourself.” (:36)

In addition to the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S., the best ways to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 continue to be washing your hands diligently, wearing a mask, and keeping a safe distance from others whenever possible.

Dr. Walsh strongly encourages unvaccinated individuals to [schedule their COVID-19 vaccine](#) today – and to avoid ivermectin altogether for the treatment and prevention of COVID-19.