

CORONAVIRUS

Sahpra mulls over application to register anti-Covid drug from Pfizer



(Photo: Joe Raedle / Getty Images)



By Estelle Ellis

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The South African Health Products Regulatory Authority confirms that it has received an application for Paxlovid, a medication proven to be highly effective against Covid-19, for registration in South Africa.

An application for Paxlovid, an anti-viral medication that has proved effective against Covid-19, especially in older patients, is currently before the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority.

Sahpra spokesperson Yuveng Gouden has confirmed receipt of the application from pharmaceutical company Pfizer and that it is being reviewed.

Pfizer [announced](#) a year ago that their anti-viral medication, Paxlovid, was working well against Covid in reducing hospitalisation and death.

The medication was trialled in a high-risk population and it was found that it reduced the risk of hospitalisation or death by 89% (within three days of symptom onset) and 88% (within five days of symptom onset) compared with a placebo. There were no deaths recorded in the study.

At the time, it also released the preliminary results of an ongoing study to test Paxlovid in adults with standard risk profiles. It showed a significant reduction in viral load for patients using Paxlovid.

“Paxlovid is highly effective,” virologist and epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim said. “It is used in most other countries where it is pretty standard.”

He said patients diagnosed with Covid in the United States received Paxlovid for free.

“You automatically qualify for Paxlovid if you are diagnosed with Covid-19,” he said. “The government pays for Paxlovid. You have to start it within three days of being diagnosed. It is highly effective in preventing hospitalisation and highly effective in preventing severe disease.

“Most countries are making it available for free. The big advantage of Paxlovid is when the virus is mutating it can escape vaccine-induced immunity, but not anti-viral protection.

“I think this is why the United States and Europe are not too worried about new variants.”

“I don’t understand why it has not been approved in South Africa yet. That drug should be made available in South Africa for the elderly. It is true that you cannot use it with certain medications, but that applies to many other medications as well.”

He said as anti-body responses from vaccines are not as strong in the elderly as they are in younger people, it was very important that Paxlovid becomes available in South Africa.

The latest [report](#) on Covid-19 cases in South Africa compiled by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases shows the numbers remain low. In 2,012 tests done on Monday, 192 positive cases were found. **DM/MC**