New Coronavirus (COVID-19) in China Is Treated With HIV Meds

One link between coronaviruses (COVID-19) and the HIV drug Kaletra dates back to the 2003 outbreak of SARS.

January 27, 2020 By Trent Straube

Health officials in China are including two HIV meds as treatment for pneumonia caused by the new coronavirus (COVID-19), reports Bloomberg News. Specifically, the country's National Health Commission in Beijing recommends the HIV drug Kaletra, which is manufactured by AbbVie and is also marketed as Aluvia.

Kaletra is a combination tablet consisting of the meds lopinavir and ritonavir. Currently, there is no proven antiviral treatment for the coronavirus, which has killed at least 80 people in mainland China and is being reported in countries across the globe, including the United States. (You can read a regularly updated collection of coronavirus articles by CNN here).

> This is how the Wuhan coronavirus affects the body
>
> https://t.co/7msJ61iJFr pic.twitter.com/8QbGMhEPjF
>
> — CNN (@CNN) January 27, 2020

Chinese health experts recommend that people with the coronavirus take two tablets of lopinavir and ritonavir twice a day along with a twice-daily dose of alpha-interferon inhaled via a nebulizer.

As of press time, the new coronavirus doesn't have a specific name. It is sometimes referred to as the Wuhan coronavirus, after the capital city of China's Hubei province, where the virus was first reported. As CNN notes, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends against naming diseases after geographical areas or populations because it can lead to stigma and fear. This new virus is also called 2019-nCoV, in which the n stands for "novel" and CoV for "coronavirus."

You can click on the video in the WHO tweet below to watch a recorded discussion about the novel coronavirus:

LIVE: Q&A on novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

https://t.co/keFOCZGA8u

— World Health Organization (WHO) (@WHO) January 27, 2020

The novel virus is spread by “close-range droplet transmission,” meaning that you likely need to be near someone with the virus to contract it. Chinese officials are also reporting that people can be contagious before they know they are ill or show any symptoms.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are seven types of coronaviruses including the newest one, which causes pneumonia, as well as SARS-CoV (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus) and MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus).

Q: Are antibiotics effective in preventing and treating the new #coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

A: No, antibiotics do not work against viruses, only bacteria.

The 2019-nC0V is a virus and, therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment. pic.twitter.com/F6qMz0ojoh

— World Health Organization (WHO) (@WHO) January 27, 2020

The CDC reports that most people contract one of the more common types of coronaviruses (not including MERS and SARS). Symptoms are similar to those of the common cold and don’t last long. However, they can advance to pneumonia or bronchitis in infants, older adults, people with cardiopulmonary disease and people with compromised immune systems.

A connection between HIV and SARS was reported during the 2003 outbreak of SARS, also in China. As aidsmap.com reported in 2004, evidence seemed to show that HIV treatment, notably Kaletra, played a protective role and also lowered the death rate.

Kaletra is in a class of HIV meds known as protease inhibitors. PIs block the protease enzymes inside CD4 cells, which HIV needs to produce new viruses.

According to the POZ Drug Chart entry on Kaletra, the tablet is not part of a recommended or alternative HIV treatment regimen for antiretroviral-naive people living with HIV, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Panel on Antiretroviral Guidelines for Adults and Adolescents. Kaletra is listed as a component of “other” regimen options.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/china-uses-hiv-meds-treat-new-coronavirus