

Dexamethasone for treating coronavirus – patient FAQ

1. What is dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is a type of medicine known as a corticosteroid which are used to treat conditions like asthma and arthritis by reducing inflammation in the body.

Corticosteroids also reduce the activity of the immune system, the body's natural defence against illness and infection.

2. How does it help people with coronavirus?

Dexamethasone seems to improve the survival rates of hospital patients with coronavirus who need:

- extra oxygen to help them breathe
- a ventilator to breathe for them

For people on ventilators, the risk of dying from coronavirus was 35 per cent lower. For people who only needed extra oxygen, the risk of dying was reduced by a fifth.

There is no proven benefit to anybody else, even if they are in hospital.

3. How has this treatment been discovered?

These results are from a study that has been happening since March called 'The Recovery Study'. It tests different medicines and whether they can help hospital patients who have coronavirus. At the moment, it's the only study to find a medicine that seems to improve some people's chances of surviving COVID-19.

4. Will I be prescribed dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone seems to only be effective in very specific circumstances. It's not helpful for most people who catch coronavirus, even if they feel very ill or to prevent you from contracting coronavirus.

Dexamethasone will only be used for you if:

- become so unwell with COVID-19 that you are taken to hospital
- need extra oxygen to help you breathe
- need a ventilator to breathe for you

Please do not request your GP to prescribe dexamethasone for you unless you are already prescribed it for pre-existing medical conditions.

In the UK, supplies of dexamethasone have been made available for hospitals to use.

5. What is important to consider?

This is a new way to treat people who have COVID-19 and as the pandemic continues there will be more research carried out on a range of medicines, including dexamethasone.

Dexamethasone is not a cure for coronavirus. Some people who take it still won't get better.

Dexamethasone can't prevent you from catching coronavirus.

The best ways to stay safe are to follow the government guidance and to regularly wash your hands, practice social distancing when you can, and wear a face mask/covering when appropriate.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-first-coronavirus-treatment-approved-for-nhs-use-by-government>