

Drug touted by Trump tied to increased risk of death in COVID-19 patients, study finds

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A pharmacy tech pours out hydroxychloroquine pills at Rock Canyon Pharmacy, in Provo, Utah, on May 20, 2020.

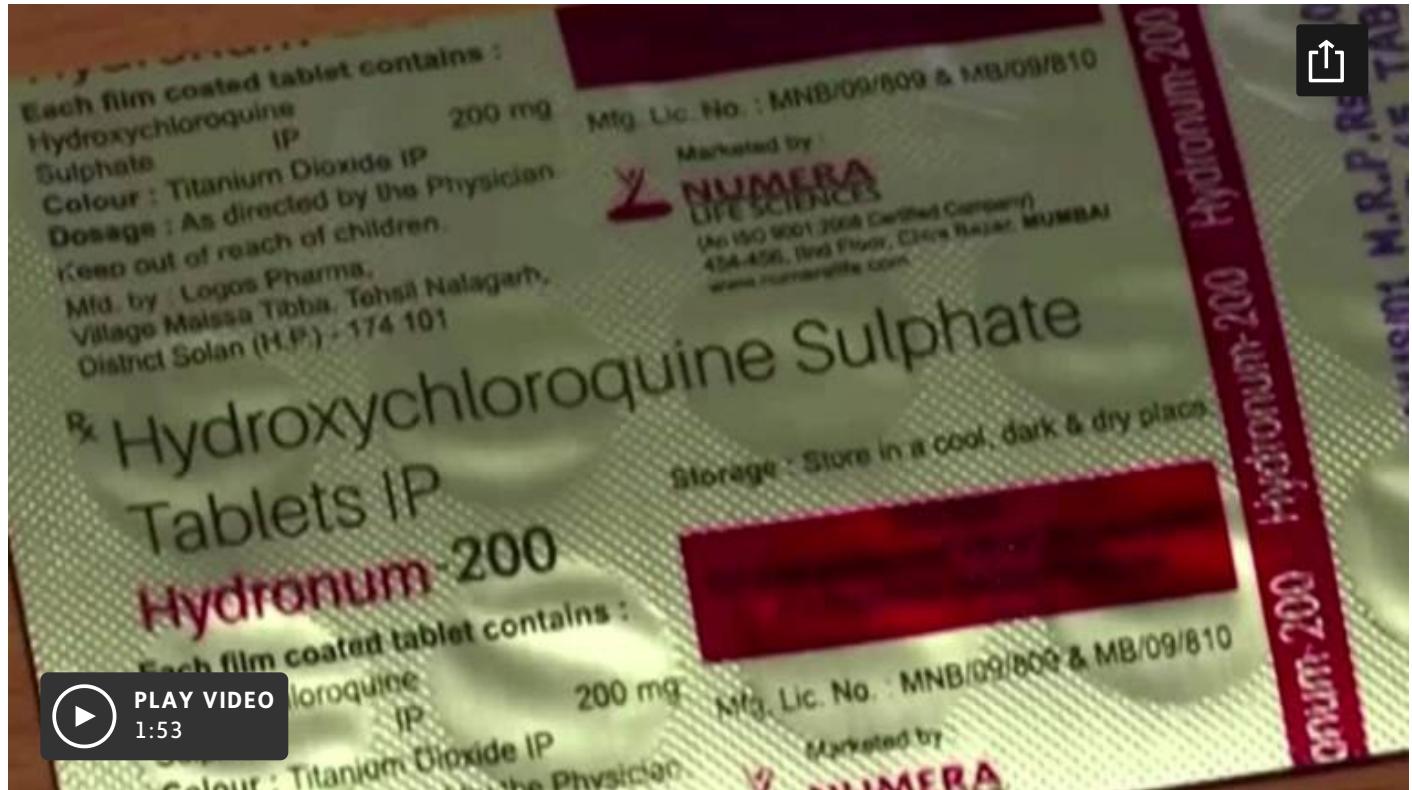
GEORGE FREY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, which U.S. President Donald Trump says he has been taking and has urged others to use, has been tied to increased risk of death in COVID-19 patients, according to a large study published in the medical journal Lancet.

In the study, which looked at more than 96,000 people in hospital with COVID-19, those treated with hydroxychloroquine or the related chloroquine had higher risk of death than patients who were not given the medicines.

The authors said they could not confirm whether taking the drug resulted in any benefit in coronavirus patients.

“Urgent confirmation from randomized clinical trials is needed,” they wrote. This study was not a placebo-controlled trial.



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Patients who've been admitted to hospital tend to have a more severe version of COVID-19. Some proponents of the drugs as treatments for the disease argue that they may need to be administered at an earlier stage in order to be effective.

There are continuing randomized, controlled clinical trials to study the drug's effectiveness in preventing infection by the new coronavirus as well as treating mild to moderate COVID-19. Some of those trials may yield results within weeks.

Demand for hydroxychloroquine has surged as Mr. Trump repeatedly pushed for its use against the coronavirus, urging people to try it. "What have you got to lose," he said.

This week, Mr. Trump said he has been taking hydroxychloroquine as a preventive medicine, despite a lack of scientific evidence.

The Lancet study authors suggested the medicines should not be used to treat COVID-19 outside of clinical trials until those studies confirm their safety and efficacy for COVID-19 patients.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has said hydroxychloroquine should only be used for COVID-19 patients in hospital or those in clinical trials. The drug has been tied to dangerous heart rhythm problems.

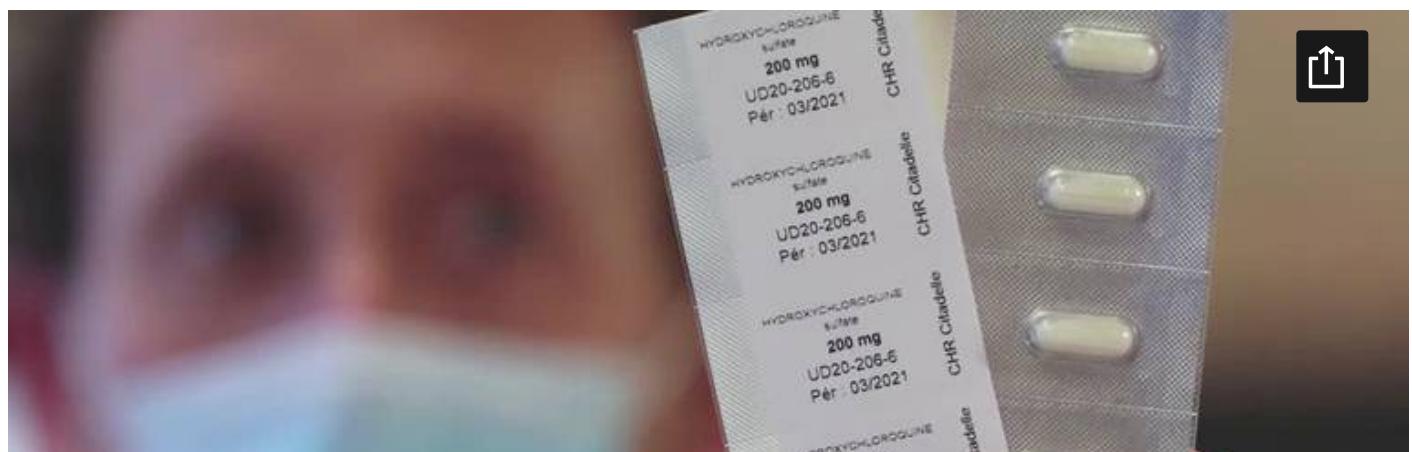
The Lancet study looked at data from 671 hospitals, where 14,888 patients were given either hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine, with or without an antibiotic, and 81,144 patients who were not treated with those drugs.

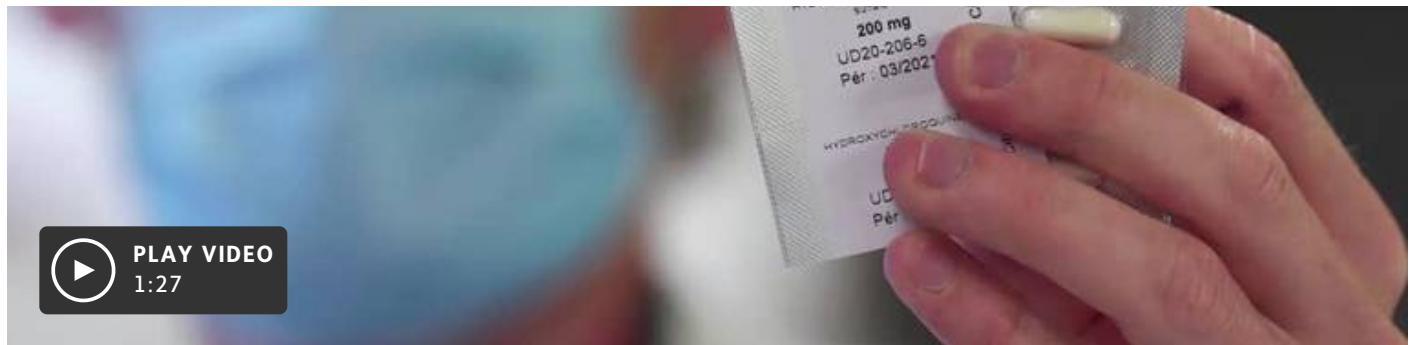
Both hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine have shown evidence of being effective against the coronavirus in a lab setting, but studies of the drugs in patients have proven inconclusive at best.

Several small studies in Europe and China spurred interest in using hydroxychloroquine against COVID-19, but were criticized for lacking scientific rigour.

Several more recent studies have not shown the drug to be an effective treatment for the disease. Last week, two studies published in the medical journal BMJ showed that patients given hydroxychloroquine did not improve significantly over those who were not.

In addition to malaria, hydroxychloroquine is used to treat lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.





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British health care workers will on Thursday begin taking part in a University of Oxford-led international trial of two anti-malarial drugs to see if they can prevent COVID-19, including one U.S. President Donald Trump says he has been taking.

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