

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

Statement on the Use of Dexamethasone for Severely Ill COVID-19 Patients

This statement aims to provide guidance and recommendation to African Union Member States.

Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is aware of the media releases of the preliminary results of a large randomized clinical trial conducted in the United Kingdom, which included dexamethasone, a corticosteroid, as one of the drugs used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. The investigators reported that administration of oral or injectable dexamethasone resulted in about one-third reduction in mortality among COVID-19 patientsⁱ that required mechanical ventilation and about one-fifth for patients requiring oxygen.

Since the release of these media reports, health authorities in the United Kingdom and South Africa have adopted dexamethasone for treatment of patients with severe forms of COVID-19.ⁱⁱ ⁱⁱⁱ The World Health Organization (WHO) has welcomed the preliminary report of the study. Dexamethasone is a generic, relatively inexpensive, drug on the WHO essential medicines list and it is widely used in Africa.

Africa CDC welcomes the news of this first drug candidate to improve survival for COVID-19 patients. The results of the trial are biologically plausible since reduction in inflammation is consistent with the mode of action of dexamethasone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Potentially life-saving treatments should not be withheld** from patients at immediate risk of death. Pending release of the full report, Member States should not withhold the use of dexamethasone from patients with severe COVID-19 disease.
2. **Member States should prepare to review local treatment guidelines** as more data becomes available.



3. **Local supply of dexamethasone** at national and facility level should be assessed to ensure availability of adequate stock.



4. **Member States should review their plans** for adoption of medical countermeasures to ensure that they can rapidly train healthcare workers in all facilities managing severe forms of COVID-19 on the correct use of dexamethasone.



5. **Member States should communicate the study results to the public** to avoid panic buying or hoarding of dexamethasone. The initial report suggests that the use of dexamethasone is beneficial to patients with severe COVID-19. The greatest positive effects were observed in those cases requiring mechanical ventilation.



6. **Member States are advised to evaluate Dexamethasone** either as part of an ongoing trial where feasible or as a new trial.

REFERENCES

- i Coronavirus breakthrough: dexamethasone is first drug shown to save lives. 16 June 2020 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01824-5>
- ii South Africa may use dexamethasone for COVID-19 patients. Experts say steroid can be considered for use on critically ill patients, President Ramaphosa tells citizens 18.06.2020 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/s-africa-may-use-dexamethasone-for-covid-19-patients/1881554>
- iii World first coronavirus treatment approved for NHS use by government <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-first-coronavirus-treatment-approved-for-nhs-use-by-government>

