

# Australia reports 'surge' in illegal hydroxychloroquine imports as people seek alternative treatments for Covid-19

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FILE PHOTO: A pharmacy worker shows pills of hydroxychloroquine © REUTERS/Yves Herman

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Australian authorities have reported a spike in drug smuggling – but not the kind they usually deal with. Aussies are importing hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial medication used as a controversial antidote to Covid-19.

Dozens of packages containing more than 6,000 tablets have been intercepted since January, the Australian Border Force (ABF) announced in a press release on Friday.

In a video posted to Twitter, the ABF showed a parcel containing several boxes hydroxychloroquine wrapped in fabric. The force warned Australians against “*self-prescribing*” the drug.



**ABF**

@AusBorderForce

Australians are being warned not to import and self-prescribe the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine as a possible treatment for COVID-19, following a surge in detections by our officers screening medical supplies crossing the border.

For more visit: [newsroom.abf.gov.au/channels/NEWS/...](https://newsroom.abf.gov.au/channels/NEWS/)



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Acting Commander Susan Drennan said personnel were “on the lookout” for illicit imports of the medication. *“Anyone considering further unauthorized imports will be wasting their money,”* she cautioned.

Australia’s Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) issued an advisory in March urging doctors to limit prescriptions of hydroxychloroquine, saying the drug could cause heart attacks and lead to comas. In April, the country’s Health Protection Principal Committee recommended against prescribing the drug to treat coronavirus, stating that the medication should only be used in clinical trials.

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The debate over hydroxychloroquine's effectiveness at countering Covid-19 is not limited to Australia. The drug has many high-profile advocates and critics, including US President Donald Trump, who suggested the anti-malarial pills could be a key weapon in the fight against the virus. Hydroxychloroquine can be used in the United States, but only as a last resort.

With a Covid-19 vaccine perhaps a year or more away, countries around the world have been scrambling to find alternative treatments. In May, the US Food and Drug Administration approved the use of antiviral drug remdesivir as an emergency treatment for the illness.