

Coronavirus

Coronavirus drug remdesivir will be ‘the standard of care,’ but not a magic bullet, Brigham and Women’s Hospital doctor says

Posted Apr 29, 2020

By [John Karalis](#) | JKaralis@masslive.com

Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, announced on Wednesday that the drug [remdesivir](#) has proven itself to be promising in treating patients with [COVID-19](#).

“The data shows that remdesivir has a clear-cut, significant, positive effect in diminishing the time to recovery,” Fauci said. “This is really quite important.”

The NIAID study is one of many testing the effectiveness of remdesivir. This particular trial was conducted internationally, and according to Fauci, was the first high-powered, placebo-controlled study of remdesivir. The results showed hospitalizations were cut from 15 to 11 days, and the death rate was cut from 11 percent to 8 percent.

Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston is participating in two [separate remdesivir studies](#). Dr. Dan Kuritzkes, chief of the hospital’s Division of Infectious Diseases, says it’s important note positive results do not mean this is a cure.

“It doesn’t mean people are safe to go out and get COVID-19 because everybody is going to be saved by remdesivir,” Kuritzkes said. “It’s certainly important progress... and it means that we will now have a means of treating people... but it’s not the same as having penicillin for pneumonia and knowing that a vast majority of people that get the drug are recovering.”

The pressure of the pandemic amplifies good news, and the [announcement earlier today](#) by remdesivir’s manufacturer, Gilead Sciences, of positive trial results helped fuel a stock market surge. Kuritzkes cautioned that overreactions to positive news

should be tempered by the reality of that drug's benefits.

"I suspect... that we will see a benefit of the drug. But it will be a modest to moderate benefit," he said. "That could be not that the drug isn't as powerful as we might hope but you really need to be treating people really early in the course of the infection to have the best impact."

Both studies at Brigham and Women's are still ongoing. Both have moved into "Plan C" phase where all patients are receiving the treatment and the results are being monitored for things like safety and appropriate length of treatment.

It's important to note this drug is not a vaccine, it is a treatment after a person has contracted COVID-19. As of right now, the treatment is given through an IV and in five or 10 day courses. In fact, the results Gilead announced this morning showed the five-day treatment seemed to be as effective as the longer course. The fact that this is a nearly week-long IV-administered drug should also temper some enthusiasm, according to Kuitzkes. This isn't an over-the-counter medicine or something you can pick up at a local pharmacy. Patients are still hospitalized for multiple days.

However, Fauci's enthusiasm stems not from the micro-view of the results of the moment, but the possibilities the findings present. This treatment has shown to block an enzyme critical to the virus' reproduction. From this, Gilead can improve remdesivir and other companies can follow their lead to create better treatments, or even combinations of drugs to improve effectiveness. The results announced today create a very important starting point once it's approved by the FDA.

"What it has proven is that a drug can block this virus," Fauci said. "This will be the standard of care."

Coronavirus in Massachusetts text alerts

Coronavirus has made thousands of people in our state sick and the death toll sometimes minute-by-minute. We'd like to offer you another way to get the information you need it.

Subscribe for FREE

MOBILE NUMBER