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Thousands more NHS patients to get life-saving COVID-19 treatment

- COVID-19 patients are to receive second life-saving treatment for hospitalised patients outside of intensive care
- Thousands more lives could be saved as UK clinical trials show tocilizumab reduced the risk of death by 14% for patients on oxygen on top of benefits from dexamethasone
- Treatment will help reduce pressures on hospitals and improve outcomes for patients

Thousands more NHS patients who are hospitalised due to COVID-19 will be able to receive life-saving treatment tocilizumab, the government has announced.

The drug reduced the relative risk of death by 14% and reduced the time spent in hospital by 5 days when used for patients on oxygen and in addition to the corticosteroid dexamethasone.

The roll-out of this treatment could also contribute significantly towards reducing pressures on hospitals over the coming weeks and months.

Scientists discovered the drug was effective during the RECOVERY clinical trial, funded by the UK government through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Last month, the international clinical trial REMAP-CAP, also funded by the government, found that tocilizumab and sarilumab reduced the risk of death for patients when administered within 24 hours of entering intensive care.

The latest findings by RECOVERY, run by the University of Oxford, show a much larger group of hospitalised patients can also benefit from the drug if it is given to those outside of intensive care with oxygen deficiency and showing signs of worsening – meaning potentially thousands more lives could be saved.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Today's excellent news is further proof the UK is at the forefront of the global mission to find safe and effective treatments for this terrible virus.

I want to thank all those who have played a part in generating these tremendous results – from the British scientists and researchers behind the trial, to the thousands of patients who took part across the country.

We are working quickly and closely with colleagues across the health system and sector to ensure every NHS patient who needs this treatment should be able to access it – reducing further pressures on the NHS and potentially saving thousands of lives.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

These results present another important advance in our fight against COVID-19 and are good news for patients and clinicians around the world – it's a combination of both effective therapeutics and vaccines that will mean an end to this pandemic.

The data published today mean many more patients in hospital with COVID-19 will have access to a proven treatment, speeding up their recovery and reducing the risk of mortality significantly.

It's because of the UK's world-class clinical trials infrastructure, including NIHR infrastructure in NHS hospitals, and the generosity of UK patients to volunteer even though they are ill themselves, that trials like RECOVERY are able to deliver definitive evidence that will save lives, and I am hugely grateful to all those involved.

Professor Stephen Powis, NHS national medical director, said:

Throughout the pandemic where the NHS leads, the world has followed – from vaccinating the first patients outside of clinical trials to helping get dexamethasone into frontline care, and now to driving forward research on another breakthrough treatment.

I am immensely proud that the NHS is delivering another breakthrough treatment that will significantly increase the chances

of survival for COVID patients being treated in England's hospitals.

This is another positive development in our continued fight against the virus and alongside the roll-out of the biggest and fastest vaccination programme in our history, with over 10 million people receiving protection so far, we can start to look to the future with hope.

The government is working closely with the manufacturer Roche to ensure the drug is available across NHS healthcare settings.

This is the second treatment that RECOVERY, the world's largest randomised controlled clinical trial, has found to be effective against COVID-19. It follows its discovery of the world-first treatment dexamethasone in June last year, which reduces the risk of death by 20% for patients on oxygen and 35% for ventilated patients.

RECOVERY has now found the benefits of using tocilizumab with dexamethasone are in addition to the benefits shown by dexamethasone alone.

Updated guidance will be sent to NHS trusts and clinicians on Monday, recommending they use this drug for hospitalised patients who may benefit from the treatment.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has supported British research with millions of pounds of funding for clinical trials into the most promising and innovative medicines in our fight against the virus, including for the RECOVERY trial.

The considerable success in large-scale clinical trials, like RECOVERY, is due to the UK's world-class researchers, life sciences industry and research infrastructure, and the willingness of the public to volunteer, as well as existing NIHR infrastructure in NHS hospitals across the country.

With over 35,649 participants, RECOVERY is the largest randomised clinical trial anywhere in the world and will continue to trial other medicines, such as colchicine and baricitinib.

Marius Scholtz, Chief Medical Officer at Roche Products Ltd, said:

Today's news is a positive step that increases our collective scientific understanding of COVID-19. It means that doctors across the NHS have access to a medicine that can help save the lives of hospitalised patients with severe COVID-19 and signs of inflammation. We are proud to have been part of a wide-ranging group, including academia, industry, the NHS, NIHR and government, that came together in an unprecedented way to fight this disease.

Tocilizumab (Roche), trade name RoActemra, is an anti-inflammatory monoclonal

antibody, approved globally for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis among other conditions.

Tocilizumab was added to the RECOVERY and REMAP-CAP trials in April.

The RECOVERY trial has demonstrated a 14% reduction in relative mortality and a 5-day reduction in hospital stays when tocilizumab is used in addition to standard of care. This is an absolute difference of 4%.

Previous results from the REMAP-CAP government-funded trial published on 7 January showed tocilizumab and sarilumab reduced the relative risk of death by 24%, when administered to patients within 24 hours of entering intensive care.

The RECOVERY trial investigates a different patient cohort to REMAP-CAP, meaning that its findings are relevant to patients in an earlier stage of the disease with oxygen deficiency, rather than those in ICU as for REMAP-CAP.

RECOVERY indicates efficacy for a patient cohort consisting of hospitalised patients who are receiving dexamethasone, are on oxygen, and have high levels of C-reactive protein (CRP) which is a marker of inflammation in the blood. Clinical guidance will be sent to trusts and clinicians shortly.

RAPID-C19 is the collaboration between the NHS, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), NIHR and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), which will coordinate the advice to clinicians on appropriate use of tocilizumab.

A single UK-wide process to prioritise COVID-19 research as Urgent Public Health (UPH) research was established by NIHR early in the pandemic which prevented duplication of effort and ensured the UK ran large enough trials to get definitive answers to key questions. NIHR and the Medical Research Council (MRC) have worked together on this.

The NHS will ensure supply is maintained for current use for the drug's current indications, such as rheumatoid arthritis.

[Detention of Zaza Gakheladze in the Georgian breakaway territory of South Ossetia: UK statement](#)

World news story

Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, expresses UK concern at the detention of Georgian citizen Mr Gakheladze at the OSCE Permanent Council.



I'd like to thank my Georgian colleague for raising this issue today.

In July, the UK joined other States in this council in expressing our concern at the detention and alleged shooting of Georgian citizen Mr Gakheladze in the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia. Today we reiterate that concern as we note that Mr Gakheladze has been arbitrarily imprisoned for 12.5 years, and we call for his immediate release.

All Georgian citizens should have the right to travel within Georgia's internationally recognised borders. These ongoing detentions and so-called "borderisation" activity (which has continued despite the current pandemic) are specifically designed to destabilise the region and have a direct negative impact on civilians living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines. This must stop.

We note the importance of the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia in this context and we call on Russia to allow them to fulfil their full mandate to monitor on all sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines.

We remain unwavering in our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and we encourage all parties to implement the six-point agreement of 2008 and its Implementing Measures in full. The recent European Court of Human Rights judgment in the case of Russia and Georgia reinforces the calls for Russia to stop its continuing violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.

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[Scottish schoolgirls succeed in UK cyber security competition](#)

Girls in Scotland have demonstrated their digital skills and codebreaking

prowess by seeing off competition from thousands of rivals in the UK's flagship cyber security contest.

Pupils at nine schools in Scotland have been successful in reaching the semi-final stage of the 2021 CyberFirst Girls Competition, run by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) – a part of GCHQ.

More than 6,500 girls nationwide entered this year's qualifying round, with teams from more than 600 schools tackling online cyber security puzzles for a chance to be named local champions and progress to the UK Grand Final.

The highest scoring teams will next take on their rivals in semi-finals in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and English regions. Schools that have already accepted their place in the virtual semi-final include: Hyndland Secondary School in Glasgow and Carluke High School in Carluke.

The NCSC is highlighting the strong nationwide participation in the contest and the success of semi-finalists today on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

The CyberFirst Girls Competition is aimed at girls aged 12 to 13 starting to think about what subjects to take for their initial qualifications and its ambition is to inspire them to consider a career in cyber security – an industry where women are still under-represented.

NCSC Deputy Director for Cyber Growth, Chris Ensor said:

On International Day of Women and Girls in Science, we're pleased to say that thousands of girls came forward to compete in this year's CyberFirst Girls Competition and we congratulate the top teams which now go forward into the semi-finals.

These girls have opened the door to what could one day be an exciting and rewarding career, where more female representation is undoubtedly needed.

We owe a special thanks to teachers who encouraged pupils to take up this fun opportunity to engage with – and hopefully be inspired by – cyber security.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

It is marvellous to see so many girls showing an interest in cyber security and well done to those who made it to the next round.

The cyber security industry needs talented people and I hope everyone who took part had fun and felt inspired to consider an exciting career cracking codes, disrupting cyber attacks and protecting our online spaces.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

The UK Government is proud to be working with Scottish schools to support girls into cyber security.

This competition is a great opportunity for girls right across the UK to learn together and develop digital skills for a 21st century workforce.

Best of luck to the Scottish pupils who have worked incredibly hard to get this far.

Since launching in 2017, more than 37,000 girls have taken part in the CyberFirst Girls Competition.

This year's semi-final rounds will take place simultaneously on Friday 19 March in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and five English regions: the North of England, Central England, the South West, the South East and London.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney said:

The CyberFirst Girls Competition is a fantastic opportunity for girls to develop new skills and get a taste of just how rewarding a career in cyber security can be.

Good luck to all those taking part this year.

The challenges, covering cryptography, logic and networking, will be set by the NCSC with input from cyber security industry partners. The winners of these events will earn their place at the Grand Final in April, where the UK champions will be crowned.

More information about the competition can be found on the NCSC's [website](#)

Over 350 additional military personnel deployed in Scottish Covid response

In the largest single deployment of military personnel in Scotland since the start of the pandemic, the uplift will take the total number of Armed Forces personnel supporting the Covid response in Scotland to 466.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK Armed Forces have demonstrated their professionalism and resilience throughout this pandemic.

They are dedicated to delivering support to the fingertips of these islands and the increase of personnel in Scotland shows our commitment to assist the civil authorities wherever and whenever needed in the fight against Covid-19.

An additional 33 defence medical staff, from across all three services, will join their 57 colleagues already working as part of the Vaccine Quick Reaction Force. Split across three vaccination teams, military personnel will assist NHS staff at vaccination centres in Dumfries and Galloway and Fife.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The vaccine roll out is the largest medical deployment this country has ever seen. I'm grateful for the efforts of our armed forces as we work together as one United Kingdom to make sure everyone eligible can get their jab as quickly as possible.

The strength of our Union is never clearer than in the power of our united response, and with over 13 million people vaccinated across the whole of the UK, we are on track to meet our target of offering a first dose to the top four priority groups by 15 February.

As part of the Scottish Government's programme of Asymptomatic Testing a total 320 personnel, from Regiments based across Scotland, will support the roll out from 15 February.

170 personnel from the 39 Engineer Regiment, based at Kinloss Barracks, and 75 personnel from both the 2nd Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, based at Leuchars Station, will now spend an initial week planning and preparing, before helping administer the tests the following week.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

Our fantastic British Armed Forces have played a key role in the fight against Covid-19 in Scotland – from coordinating the emergency response in the early days of the pandemic, to setting up testing sites in the summer, and assisting with the first vaccination centres. We are grateful for all their efforts to keep

us safe and help defeat the virus.

Getting jabs into arms is essential, and I am grateful that military personnel will continue to help with Scotland's vital vaccination programme.

Alongside the rollout of vaccines, testing remains extremely important. I am pleased that the expertise of our armed forces will help set up Scotland's new asymptomatic testing programme.

As we continue to see during the pandemic, the strength of the Union and support offered by the UK Government has never been more important.

The Armed Forces have supported Scotland in a range of ways throughout the pandemic; currently 32 planning and liaison staff are working with NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government. 24 logistic support staff, mostly from Edinburgh-based 3rd Battalion The Rifles, are also assisting health boards run vaccination centres in Grampian, Dumfries and Galloway, Borders and Lothian.

The 98 members of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards already deployed to help set up 80 Vaccine Centres across Scotland will successfully complete their task on Monday, when they handover the sites to NHS Scotland.

Since March 2020, the UK Armed Forces have provided Scotland with planners, logistics specialists and aircraft medical evacuation capability, as well as the delivery of a Mobile Testing Unit service throughout last summer.

Across the UK there are over 5,200 personnel committed to winter and COVID-19 operations are supporting 80 different tasks in the UK and abroad – this includes the vaccine rollout, NHS support and community testing across the UK.