

Health Ministry to begin clinical trials for Covid-19 treatment

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CORONAVIRUS | The Health Ministry will soon begin clinical trials, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, to test various medications to treat Covid-19 patients.

Health Ministry director-general Noor Hisham Abdullah said the Health Ministry will start with a clinical trial to test the effectiveness and safety of Remdesivir, a drug originally developed for Ebola patients, to treat Covid-19 patients.

He said this is part of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Solidarity Trial, an international effort to test a combination of medications on Covid-19 treatment.

"The research, coordinated by the WHO across the globe, is an effort to gather data and compare the safety and effectiveness of a combination of medicine comprising Remdesivir, Lopinavir/Ritonavir, Interferon beta, Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine," he told a press conference in Putrajaya today.

Lopinavir and Ritonavir were originally developed to treat patients suffering from AIDS while interferon beta is used to treat multiple sclerosis.

Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine are anti-malaria drugs.

Noor Hisham said the research protocol has been approved to allow the clinical trial to begin.

"The Medical Research and Ethics Committee (MREC), has worked closely with the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA), the regulatory body responsible for approving drugs for clinical trials.

"The evaluation was made based on three primary aspects, namely safety, quality and preliminary effectiveness of the drug based on the data presented.

"Taking cognisance of the significance of the clinical trial in the effort to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, the MREC and NPRA managed to approve the research protocol and clinical trial import licence in a short time frame (four working days) while maintaining the evaluation quality in line with international procedures and regulatory requirements," he said.

He said nine hospitals will be involved in the clinical trial.

He said the hospitals are ready to accept participants in the trial from among Covid-19 patients who fulfil the criteria.

"Malaysia's participation in the global research is expected to help find drugs that can save the lives of Covid-19 patients," he said.

He said they will soon start identifying patients to participate in the trial.

There are several criteria, he said, such as what stage of the disease the patient currently is in, he said.

"First of all, we will see in terms of the category of patient. If they are positive but asymptomatic, maybe we will not include, but we will look at those with symptoms and also inflammation.

"The third category that has inflammation but does not require oxygen, the fourth category that has lung inflammation and requires oxygen as well as the fifth category, the late stage which requires ventilators," he explained.

Noor Hisham today announced that there were 84 new confirmed positive cases and one new death while there were 95 cases of recoveries.

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