

Novartis announces first European donation of hydroxychloroquine to Switzerland

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- Novartis has committed to making a global donation of up to 130 million doses of the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to support efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Sandoz, the generics and biosimilars division of Novartis, today begins delivering the first doses of hydroxychloroquine to the Swiss authorities, who are organizing its distribution to hospitals.
- Switzerland becomes the first country in Europe, and the second globally after the USA, to receive a donation of this drug.

Rotkreuz, April 3, 2020 – Today, Novartis, announced the donation of a substantial amount of hydroxychloroquine to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients within Switzerland. The aim of the donation is to enable patients to access a potential treatment while also advancing clinical research in the fight against COVID-19. Switzerland is the second country in the world after the USA, and the first in Europe, to receive a donation of this medication. The Swiss authorities are responsible for distributing the drug to hospitals.

The treatment protocol issued by the Swiss Society for Infectious Diseases (SSI) includes hydroxychloroquine among the recommended treatments for hospitalized patients infected with COVID-19. Several clinical trials are underway to research the effect of hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine, a related substance, in treating COVID-19. This compound is used to treat malaria and auto-immune diseases such as lupus erythematosus and chronic polyarthritis. The product has not yet been approved in Europe for treating COVID-19 infections. The Swiss regulatory authority, Swissmedic, responded quickly to the SSI's treatment recommendation, fast-tracking the procedure to license Sandoz's drug for use on the Swiss market. The approval is valid for the treatment of malaria and autoimmune diseases, but the drug will be used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients under controlled medical supervision and responsibility.

"This is a fantastic initiative that aims to help COVID-19 patients around the world, including in Switzerland, by getting a potentially effective drug to them quickly. The initiative also allows hydroxychloroquine to be tested in large-scale studies," says Professor Manuel Battegay, Head Physician Infectious Diseases & Hospital Hygiene, University Hospital Basel, who is a key contributor to the nationwide therapeutic concepts for COVID-19 patients involving hydroxychloroquine."

Jan Tangermann, Country Head of Sandoz Switzerland, the generics and biosimilars division of Novartis, added: "At present, it is more important than ever that we fulfill our mission of providing primary healthcare in Switzerland. By donating this sizable quantity of hydroxychloroquine to the Swiss authorities, we are playing our part in this by enabling patients to access a potential treatment and supporting clinical research in the fight against COVID-19."

This donation given to Switzerland is part of the commitment made by Novartis to donate 130 million 200 mg doses of hydroxychloroquine globally by the end of May, subject to the condition that local regulatory authorities support the use of the drug for patients infected with COVID-19. In addition, Sandoz intends to work closely with other manufacturers to boost the production of hydroxychloroquine if required, and assist with supplying it to countries around the world.

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