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Russia Approves Unproven Malaria Drug to Treat Coronavirus

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More than a dozen countries are studying the effects of hydroxychloroquine to prevent and treat Covid-19. Studies have warned that the drug can be deadly when combined with other drugs. **Aleksander Avilov / Moskva News Agency**

The Russian government has authorized hospitals to treat coronavirus patients with the untested malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, which studies have linked to potentially deadly side effects.

Thursday's decree instructs Russia's national medical cardiology research center to distribute 68,600 packs of hydroxychloroquine donated by a Shanghai pharmaceutical company to hospitals across Russia for free.

Related article: Moscow Doctors Forced to Self-Test Risky Malaria Drug for Coronavirus – BBC

More than a dozen countries are studying the effects of hydroxychloroquine to prevent and

treat Covid-19. Studies have warned that the drug can be deadly when combined with other drugs, prompting scientists to urge countries to hold off on using it to treat coronavirus until larger trials show its safety and effectiveness.

A BBC Russia report last week said that doctors in Moscow were being required to test hydroxychloroquine on themselves despite the drug's known side effects and the study's stated voluntary nature.

Moscow's health department issued a tender in early April to buy 2.6 million rubles ($33,200) worth of hydroxychloroquine.

Russian scientists are testing vaccine prototypes for the new coronavirus and plan to start human trials of experimental vaccines in June.

Vektor, a top Russian research center, said it has vaccine platform technologies that have already been tested in humans for other infections and could be used for Covid-19.

Russia has reported a total of 32,008 coronavirus cases, ranking it the 11th in the world, and 273 deaths as of Friday.

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