Half of Kiwis eligible for potentially lifesaving COVID-19 antiviral treatments know little about them – survey

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, 13 October 2022 – New research released today reveals that despite one million New Zealanders being eligible to treat their COVID-19 infection with antiviral medication*, over half (54%) know very little about the treatments.

The online study of more than 1,500 Kiwis, sponsored by Pfizer, was undertaken in partnership with New Zealand research firm Talbot Mills to understand New Zealanders' awareness of antivirals.

Pfizer New Zealand Medical Director, Krishan Thiru, said it is concerning that so many vulnerable Kiwis are largely unknowing of this potentially lifesaving treatment.

"The findings show that those most at risk are lacking overall understanding of antiviral treatments, their benefits and how to access them. Our concern is that this may not improve over summer unless we work together to ensure those who need it the most are not left behind," Mr Thiru said.

In the EPIC-HR trial, it was found that Pfizer's antiviral treatment PAXLOVID reduced the risk of hospital admission or dying from COVID-19 by up to 86%, compared to placebo, in non-hospitalised, high-risk adult and unvaccinated patients treated within five days of symptom onset. [1]

When explained how PAXLOVID works and the potential benefits of the treatment, nearly two thirds (62%) of the general public aware of antivirals said having access to the medicine would make them less fearful of catching the virus. For those who are highest risk of death and hospitalisations from COVID-19, three in five (61%) said it made them less fearful.

The eligibility criteria for antivirals is aimed at New Zealanders who have the highest risk of death and hospitalisations from COVID-19. Research released last month by the Public Health Agency, found Māori and Pasifika, those with underlying health conditions, and older Kiwis are among those who have a much higher risk of dying from the virus.

The research found that over half (54%) of people who identified as Māori and Pasifika and were aged over 50 said their knowledge of antivirals was poor.

Thiru said it was important that disproportionately affected communities talk about the COVID-19 treatment options available so that their whānau are protected and feel empowered to learn more and seek advice from a health professional.

"While vaccination remains the most effective way to help prevent COVID-19, antiviral treatments provide a strong second line of defence for those most at risk," Mr Thiru said.

"Eligible New Zealanders need to act fast after testing positive for COVID-19, calling their doctor or pharmacist straight away.

"PAXLOVID is fully funded and now available for eligible New Zealanders at over 400 pharmacy locations nationwide, with free delivery offered to patients' homes if required. This means more Kiwis will be able to access the medication either through their healthcare professional or from a pharmacy, helping to reduce the strain on our health system," he said.

People who think they may be eligible for PAXLOVID are encouraged to talk to their pharmacist or general practitioner (GP) about their eligibility for antiviral medication. Eligibility will depend on several factors, including age, ethnicity, other health conditions and vaccination status.

Speak to your pharmacist or GP to check if PAXLOVID is right for you. For more details, check out Pharmac's access criteria here and visit: www.treatpositive.co.nz.

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Pfizer Media Contact:
mediaANZ@pfizer.com

Notes for the Editor:

Pharmac's access criteria for COVID-19 antivirals is available at: COVID-19 antivirals: Access Criteria - Pharmac | New Zealand Government

At a COVID-19 briefing in September, the New Zealand Government announced it had secured 100,000 treatment courses of PAXLOVID in 2022, making it available to around one million Kiwis. This follows the initial supply agreement signed in December 2021, and Medsafe's provisional consent for the supply and use of PAXLOVID in New Zealand in March 2022.

*About Antivirals

A COVID-19 antiviral treatment is a medicine that works by slowing or stopping the virus from replicating. This may help reduce symptoms and the risk of significant health complications.

About the Research

Pfizer engaged with Talbot Mills to undertake research into New Zealanders' understanding of antiviral treatments. The research was conducted on the Stickybeak platform and through Talbot Mills Research online daily tracking survey.

The survey comprised of 1,391 members of the general public, and 595 people who were categorised as "at-risk" of COVID-19. The at-risk component was made up of 278 people who were immunocompromised or who have three or more high risk medical conditions, 58 Māori and Pasifika aged 50 or over and 327 people aged 65 or over. The maximum margin of error (at 95% confidence) for a random sample of n=1391 is +/- 2.6 and of n=595 is +/- 4.0.

About PAXLOVID® (nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets)

PAXLOVID is a SARS-CoV-2 main protease (Mpro) inhibitor (also known as SARS-CoV-2 3CL protease inhibitor) therapy. It was developed to be administered orally so that it can be prescribed early after infection, potentially helping patients avoid severe illness (which can lead to hospitalisation and death). Nirmatrelvir [PF-07321332], which originated in Pfizer laboratories, is designed to block the activity of the Mpro, an enzyme that the coronavirus needs to replicate. Co-administration with a low dose of ritonavir helps slow the metabolism, or breakdown, of nirmatrelvir in order for it to remain active in the body for longer periods of time at higher concentrations to help combat the virus.

Nirmatrelvir is designed to inhibit viral replication at a stage known as proteolysis, which occurs before viral RNA replication. In preclinical studies, nirmatrelvir did not demonstrate evidence of mutagenic DNA interactions.

Current variants of concern can be resistant to treatments that work by binding to the spike protein found on the surface of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. PAXLOVID, however, works intracellularly by binding to the highly conserved Mpro (3CL protease) of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to inhibit viral replication. Nirmatrelvir has shown consistent in vitro antiviral activity against the following variants: Alpha, Beta, Delta, Gamma, Lambda, Mu, and Omicron BA.1 and BA.2.

PAXLOVID is generally administered at a dose of 300 mg (two 150 mg tablets) of nirmatrelvir with one 100 mg tablet of ritonavir, given twice-daily for five days. One carton contains five blister packs of PAXLOVID, as co-packaged nirmatrelvir tablets with ritonavir tablets, providing all required doses for a full five-day treatment course.

About Pfizer: Breakthroughs That Change Patients' Lives™

At Pfizer, we apply science and our global resources to bring therapies to people that extend and significantly improve their lives. We strive to set the standard for quality, safety and value in the discovery, development and manufacture of health care products, including innovative medicines and vaccines. Every day, Pfizer colleagues work across developed and emerging markets to advance wellness, prevention, treatments and cures that challenge the most feared diseases of our time. Consistent with our responsibility as one of the world's premier innovative biopharmaceutical companies, we collaborate with health care providers, governments and local communities to support and expand access to reliable, affordable health care around the world. For more than 170 years, we have worked to make a difference for all who rely on us. For more information, please visit: www.pfizer.co.nz

Disclosure Notice

The information contained in this release is as of 12 October 2022. Pfizer assumes no obligation to update forward-looking statements contained in this release as the result of new information or future events or developments.

This statement contains forward-looking information about Pfizer's efforts to combat COVID-19 and PAXLOVID (including a Phase 2/3 study in paediatric patients, a potential age-appropriate formulation for three additional planned cohorts of younger than 6 years old, qualitative assessments of available data, potential benefits, expectations for clinical trials, advance purchase agreements and an agreement with MPP, efforts toward equitable access, the anticipated timing of data readouts, regulatory submissions, regulatory approvals or authorisations, potential to maintain antiviral activity against current variants of concern, planned investment and anticipated manufacturing, distribution and supply), involving substantial risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results to differ materially from those expressed or implied by such statements. Risks and uncertainties include, among other things, the uncertainties inherent in research and development, including the ability to meet anticipated clinical endpoints, commencement and/or completion dates for clinical trials, regulatory submission dates, regulatory approval dates and/or launch dates, as well as risks associated with preclinical and clinical data, including the possibility of unfavourable new preclinical, clinical or safety data and further analyses of existing preclinical, clinical or safety data, the ability to produce comparable clinical or other results including efficacy, safety and tolerability profile observed to date, in additional studies or in larger, more diverse populations following commercialisation; the ability of PAXLOVID to maintain efficacy against emerging virus variants; the risk that serious and unexpected adverse events may occur that have not been previously reported with PAXLOVID use; the risk that preclinical and clinical trial data are subject to differing interpretations and assessments, including during the peer review/publication process, in the scientific community generally, and by regulatory authorities; whether regulatory authorities will be satisfied with the design of and results from these and any future preclinical and clinical studies; whether and when any drug applications or submissions to request emergency use or conditional marketing authorisation for any potential indications for PAXLOVID may be filed in particular jurisdictions and if obtained, whether or when such emergency use authorisation or licenses will expire or terminate; whether and when regulatory authorities in any jurisdictions may approve any applications or submissions for PAXLOVID that may be pending or filed (including a potential new drug application submission in the U.S. and submissions in other jurisdictions), which will depend on myriad factors, including making a determination as to whether the product's benefits outweigh its known risks and determination of the product's efficacy and, if approved, whether it will be commercially successful; decisions by regulatory authorities impacting labelling or marketing, manufacturing processes, safety and/or other matters that could affect the availability or commercial potential of PAXLOVID, including development of products or therapies by other companies; risks related to the availability of raw materials for PAXLOVID; the risk that we may not be able to create or scale up manufacturing capacity on a timely basis or maintain access to logistics or supply channels commensurate with global demand, which would negatively impact our ability to supply the estimated numbers of courses of PAXLOVID within the projected time periods; whether and when additional purchase agreements will be reached; the risk that demand for any products may be reduced or no longer exist; uncertainties regarding the impact of COVID-19 on Pfizer's business, operations and financial results; and competitive developments.

A further description of risks and uncertainties can be found in Pfizer's Annual Report on Form 10-K for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2021 and in its subsequent reports on Form 10-Q, including in the sections thereof captioned "Risk Factors" and "Forward-Looking Information and Factors That May Affect Future Results", as well as in its subsequent reports on Form 8-K, all of which are filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and available at www.sec.gov and www.pfizer.com.

TAPS Approval No: NP18478

[1] Hammond J *et al. N Eng J Med* 2022; 386:1397–1408.