

ITM launches research into hydroxychloroquine in fight against COVID-19

Scientists will examine whether hydroxychloroquine influences the duration of the contagiousness of COVID-19.

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Dit is de omschrijving

Researchers of the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp have started a new study on hydroxychloroquine as a treatment option for COVID-19 outpatients. The study focuses mostly on infected health professionals who present only mild symptoms. The scientists will examine whether hydroxychloroquine influences the duration of the infectivity of COVID-19. The study began this week and will last several weeks.

Hydroxychloroquine, an old malaria treatment, has become a talking point in recent weeks as it may prove effective against COVID-19. Its benefits, however, have so far remained unconfirmed and are based on only a handful of early trials in China and France among other countries.

Christophe Van Dijck, one of the researchers working on the study, explains: "We are doing this research because there is such hype about hydroxychloroquine but hardly any scientifically substantiated data about its treatment response in COVID-19 patients. We hope that the drug can reduce the spread of virus particles by infected individuals, which means that their contagiousness lasts less long, but we will need to investigate this further." Hydroxychloroquine is administered in the form of tablets and in addition to malaria is also used to treat some rheumatic pathologies because of its anti-inflammatory properties.

For this study, ITM's research team is working mainly with health professionals who are in the front line of the fight against COVID-19. Christophe Van Dijck continues: "If, with a hydroxychloroquine cure, an infected person propagates the viral particles during a shorter period, then those who are key to our care system can return to work more quickly and the risk of the infection spreading through them will be significantly reduced. Absenteeism will also be limited as a result."

"Healthcare staff are a very strong group for us to work with as they are familiar with the medical setting. We can include other groups in our study if at some point the government relaxes its restrictions on COVID-19 screening and more people are tested early," he said.

ITM has decades of experience in fighting infectious diseases and has sound experience in supporting and coordinating complex clinical trials in difficult conditions, such as in developing countries. A team of specialised ITM doctors has been involved in the COVID-19 response at the Antwerp University Hospital since the outbreak began.