

New drugs for COVID arrive – along with some confusion

They treat symptoms of virus but don't prevent it

By MICHAEL ROKNICK Herald Business Editor

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Ida Menold, a pharmacist and a Walberg Family Pharmacies' manager, checks on medication supplies at the local chain's Hempfield Township store. Two new prescription drugs, Paxlovid and molnupiravir, have hit pharmacy shelves and are meant for those with COVID-19, are within the first 5 days of symptoms, and who are at high risk for COVID-19 hospitalization and death.

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Two new drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration to combat COVID-19 are being rolled out – and are creating confusion, said the owner of a local pharmacy chain.

“These aren’t vaccines like people have been getting,” said Bretton Walberg, who, along with his wife Stacey, owns Walberg Family Pharmacies. The Jamestown-based business has 11 regional locations.

The two medications – Pfizer’s Paxlovid and Merck’s molnupiravir – are new weapons in the battle against the coronavirus. The drugs were approved in December for COVID treatment.

Both drugs are pills, not injections. The more important distinction, however, is that both are antiviral treatments for people who have contracted the virus.

“But here’s the important thing to know,” Walberg said. “Vaccines are a preventative, but the new drugs approved by the FDA are a treatment.”

Vaccines help patients develop immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 without having to get the illness, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states on its website. The two new drugs are designed for people who have already contracted COVID-19 to help alleviate symptoms.

“The new drugs aren’t medicine you can take to prevent you from getting the coronavirus,” Walberg said. “You can’t take it and go to see somebody who has COVID and hope not to get the virus.”

The medication is designed for those having mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms, and also who are at high risk for COVID-19 hospitalization and death.

The drugs require a prescription and are available only to those who have tested positive for COVID-19. To produce a benefit, treatment must begin in order to produce a benefit.

Paxlovid is authorized for people ages 12 and older. Molnupiravir is authorized for those 18 and older, the CDC said.



A bottle of molnupiravir, a new drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration for those with COVID-19. The medication, along with Paxlovid, can only be prescribed by a doctor.



Ida Menold, a pharmacist and a Walberg Family Pharmacies' manager, prepares a prescription at the local company's Hempfield Township store. Two new medications, Paxlovid and molnupiravir, are now available for those with COVID-19 who meet certain conditions. The drugs can't prevent anyone from contracting the coronavirus.

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Walberg said anyone with prescriptions for the antiviral treatments can call one of the chain's stores to have the drugs delivered curbside or through a drive-through window.

But an injection of prevention is still worth a pill of cure, says the CDC, which urges people to get vaccinated as the best way to ward off the coronavirus.

"We're still giving vaccines," Walberg said.

"The new drugs aren't medicine you can take to prevent you from getting the coronavirus."

- Pharmacy chain owner Bretton Walberg