



## ADVISORY

### REMINDER OF RISK OF SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS WITH CHLOROQUINE AND HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE DURING THE COVID-19

**Date:** The 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020.

#### **Target Audience:**

- Provincial Health Departments;
- Healthcare Professionals;
- Investigators of clinical trials;
- Patients and relatives of patient; and
- General Public.

#### **Problem or Issue**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2020, European Medicine Agency (EMA) issued a reminder wherein it was informed that Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine are known to potentially cause heart rhythm problems, and these could be exacerbated if treatment is combined with other medicines, such as the antibiotic azithromycin, that have similar effects on the heart. Further, it was also informed that recent studies have reported serious, in some cases fatal, heart rhythm problems with Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine, particularly when taken at high doses or in combination with the antibiotic Azithromycin.

It was informed that these medicines are being used in the context of the on-going pandemic for treating patients with COVID-19 and investigated in clinical trials. However, clinical data are still very limited and inconclusive, and the beneficial effects of these medicines in COVID-19 have not been demonstrated. Results from large, well-designed studies are needed to make any conclusions. Some clinical trials currently investigating the effectiveness of Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine in treating COVID-19 use higher doses than those recommended for the authorised indications. While serious side effects can occur with recommended doses, higher doses can increase the risk of these side effects, including abnormal electrical activity that affects the heart rhythm (QT-prolongation). EMA further informed that numbers of large, randomised clinical trials are looking at the benefits and risks of Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine in patients with COVID-19. In the context of COVID-19, EMA recommended that these medicines should only be used as part of clinical trials or in line with nationally agreed protocols. They must not be used without a prescription and without supervision by a doctor.

#### **Therapeutic Goods:**

Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine are used for treatment of malaria and certain autoimmune diseases such as chronic discoid lupus erythematosus, systemic lupus erythematosus in adults, and rheumatoid arthritis. In addition to side effects affecting the heart, they are known to potentially cause liver and kidney problems, nerve cell damage that can lead to seizures (fits) and low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia).

#### **Advice for Healthcare Professionals and Patients:**

Healthcare professionals such as doctors, pharmacists and nurses are advised to closely monitor patients with COVID-19 receiving Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine and to take into account pre-existing heart





problems that can make patients more prone to heart rhythm issues. They should carefully consider the possibility of side effects, particularly with higher doses, and exercise extra caution when combining treatment with other medicines such as azithromycin that may cause similar side effects on the heart.

Patients, relatives of patient and public are advised to **completely avoid self-medication of any prescription drug particularly “Chloroquine” and “Hydroxychloroquine” in current situation for prevention and or management of “COVID-19”**. In case of any doubt of acquiring infection, patient and public are requested to seek medical advice from qualified healthcare professionals and must refrain from taking decisions regarding use of drugs at their own end.

Healthcare professionals, patients and those investigators who have approved clinical trials of Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine from DRAP are requested to report any suspected adverse drug reactions to **Pakistan National Pharmacovigilance Centre, Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan** through **DRAP Med Vigilance e-reporting system** [http://: https://primaryreporting.who-umc.org/Reporting/Reporter?OrganizationID=PK](http://primaryreporting.who-umc.org/Reporting/Reporter?OrganizationID=PK) or at [npc@dra.gov.pk](mailto:npc@dra.gov.pk).

#### Reference:

1. COVID-19: reminder of risk of serious side effects with chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine by European Medicine Agency (EMA), dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2020.  
<https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/covid-19-reminder-risk-serious-side-effects-chloroquine-hydroxychloroquine>

