

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | January 13, 2021

Individuals with COVID-19 at high risk for serious complications have more treatment options and are encouraged to talk to their health care providers ASAP

BISMARCK, N.D. – The state of North Dakota and the North Dakota Medical Association (NDMA) are working together to encourage individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and are at high risk for serious complications to reach out to their health care providers as soon as possible to discuss new treatment options, including whether monoclonal antibodies may be right for them.

In late November, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an [emergency use authorization](#) for monoclonal antibodies.

Dr. Joshua Ranum, vice president of NDMA and a member of its physician advisory group, said the new medications bamlanivimab and casirivimab/imdevimab are designed to reduce the risk of hospitalization and severe illness in high-risk individuals who test positive for COVID-19.

“I have seen firsthand how COVID-19 has devastated families. People are anxious when they test positive - especially if they are high-risk. They wonder if they will end up in the hospital,” Ranum said. “They should talk to their health care providers about this new treatment option in the fight against COVID-19.”

Ranum has prescribed the outpatient infusion (I-V) treatment to appropriate patients at West River Health Services in Hettinger, N.D. He said the medications are safe and effective and explained that they can boost the body’s natural disease fighting abilities if given in the early stages of illness.

“They work by targeting the spike protein in the coronavirus molecule to neutralize it,” Ranum said. “This reduces the amount of active virus in a patient’s body and gives a patient’s immune system time to build antibodies against the virus and continue the fight. Research has shown that of those who have received the treatment, only three percent required hospitalization.”

Ranum said the earlier these medications are administered after a positive test, the better, but stressed these medications are not appropriate for individuals who are already hospitalized or need increased supplemental oxygen.

Commenting on the need to increase awareness and access to the medications, Gov. Burgum noted that as part of North Dakota’s efforts to save lives, contact tracers will be encouraging high-risk individuals with COVID-19 to talk to their health care providers about treatment. The state has also begun distributing these medications by courier to the 36 critical access hospitals in North Dakota and the six major referral hospitals in Grand Forks, Fargo, Bismarck and Minot.

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“Along with vaccines and rapid testing, effective therapeutics are part of our three-pronged attack on COVID-19 and can save lives if administered at the right time,” Burgum said. “This battle is far from over, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and we’ve got the tools to get us there.”

Who is eligible for the treatment?

The treatment is appropriate for individuals age 65 and older who test positive for COVID-19, are not hospitalized and are not receiving extra oxygen, as well as for individuals age 55 and older who test positive and also have heart disease, high blood pressure or certain lung conditions.

Individuals age 12 and older who have additional risk factors, including obesity, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and weak immune systems may also benefit from the treatment.

The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) has a [chart online](#) showing who may benefit from monoclonal antibody treatment.

Individuals should always discuss their medical treatment options with their health care providers.

Questions about nearest infusion center location?

Individuals with questions about the nearest infusion center location are encouraged to **contact NDDoH’s COVID-19 hotline at 866-207-2880**, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Saturday, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

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