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China tests Russian anti-viral drug which might treat coronavirus as Moscow warns of possible 'mass outbreak'

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While health chiefs prepare for a potential pandemic, China is testing a Russian anti-viral drug in the hope that it might help control the new coronavirus. It comes as prospects of a vaccine look slim for the foreseeable future.

Triazavirin, developed at Yekaterinburg's Ural Federal University, was originally developed to combat 'Bird Flu' (H5N1), and, given that there are some similarities between the two infections, researchers feel it's worth a punt. The medicine is already known to be effective against 15 types of flu.

Russia's Deputy Health Minister Sergei Kraevoy confirmed the news on Tuesday. He also revealed that the Chinese still haven't shared samples required for a vaccine with foreign researchers, adding that without these it's impossible to start looking for a remedy.

*"It takes literally several months, from two to five (to conduct preclinical studies)," Kraevoy said. "To do this, you need a live native virus. Unfortunately, at the moment we don't have this very important living virus," he explained.*

Kraevoy conceded that Russian officials are preparing for a possible large-scale infection, but he gave assurances that the country has sufficient stock of equipment and medicine to deal with the consequences.

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Launched in the local market at the end of 2014, it's claimed Triazavirin is effective against Rift

Valley fever and the West Nile virus, in addition to other viral infections. It is also being studied for possible use against Ebola.

The number reported of cases of the new coronavirus (known as 2019-nCoV) worldwide now exceeds 20,600 people with 426 dead in China alone, according to the latest data. The World Health Organization has declared the outbreak a public health emergency.

The main symptoms include a dry cough, weakness, increased body temperature, and difficulty breathing. It was first reported in late December in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The virus is transmitted by droplet transmission, as well as by touching the eyes with hands which have the virus on them.

Russia has, so far, recorded two cases; both of the sufferers are Chinese citizens. In a bid to stop the spread of the infection, authorities have closed the Far Eastern border with China, canceled work and group travel visas for Chinese citizens, shut down passenger railway connections, and heavily restricted flights between the two countries.

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