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Race for medicines against Corona: 155 drugs and 79 vaccinations in development worldwide



A total of 155 drugs and 79 vaccinations to combat COVID-19 are currently being worked on worldwide. The Austrian Institute for Health Technology Assessment (AIHTA) announced this.

Most of the 155 drugs under development against COVID-19 are already approved for other (viral) infections and therefore require special evidence for approval against COVID-19, explains the institute in Vienna, which specializes in scientific decision-making support in healthcare. Of the 79 vaccine candidates, none has yet reached the development stage.

Worldwide, pharmaceutical and biotech companies, university institutes, research institutes and clinics invest enormous resources in research and development relating to drugs and vaccines to combat the pandemic. It is becoming increasingly difficult for decision-makers from politics and health care to keep an overview – although cost-intensive decisions are necessary at the latest when the first prophylaxis or therapies become available, according to the institute.

AIHTA has compiled an overview of worldwide research and development activities in the area of COVID-19 in order to provide evidence-based support for future decisions. Priv. Lecturer Dr. phil. Claudia Wild, head of the AIHTA: "The aim (...) is to provide early information on intervention options that are currently in the R&D stage. Over the next few months, their developments will continue to be monitored, data processed and evidence-based purchasing supported by healthcare. "

Overall, the team led by Dr. Wild uses international sources to identify 155 drugs that are currently being tested for their effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2 / COVID-19. These are all based on one or more of the following known antiviral agents: Remdesivir, Lopinavir + Ritonavir (Kaletra®), Favipirvir (Avigan®), Darunavir (Prezista®), Chloroquine Phosphate (Resochin®), Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®), Camostat Mesilate (Foipan®), APN01 (rhACE2), Tocilizumab (Roactemra®), Sarilumab (Kevzara®) and Interferon beta 1a (SNG001). "Since the majority of these active ingredients are drugs that are already approved for other indications, international regulators emphasize the need for robust evidence for approval studies," says Wild.

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The 79 vaccine candidates that the AIHTA was able to identify as part of the HSS are divided into three types of vaccine: live vaccines (with weakened virus strains), dead vaccines (with virus proteins) or gene-based vaccines (with special DNA or mRNA). Most of these projects are currently still in the development stage and have not yet been approved.

The AIHTA has created so-called vignettes for medicines and vaccines that are particularly advanced in development or those that are considered particularly promising in the specialist literature. These are concise short descriptions that provide additional information. In total, the AIHTA created 11 vignettes for medicines and 8 for vaccine candidates.