

Covid: 55 deaths 'could have been prevented' but patients were denied life-saving drug dexamethasone

HEALTH

CORONAVIRUS

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Health and Science Producer



A total of 55 **Covid-19 deaths** could have been prevented in the UK, but hospital patients were denied a life-saving steroid readily available on the NHS, documents have revealed.

Scientists estimate that one quarter of eligible people hospitalised with Covid-19 since mid-June were not given the cheap steroid **dexamethasone**.

That's despite a UK-led study, **championed by the Prime Minister**, that showed the drug significantly reduced mortality in patients needing oxygen support in hospital.

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'greatly reduce' the risk of dying with Covid-19
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Documents released on Friday by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), showed that researchers discovered the drug has not been used in all eligible circumstances.

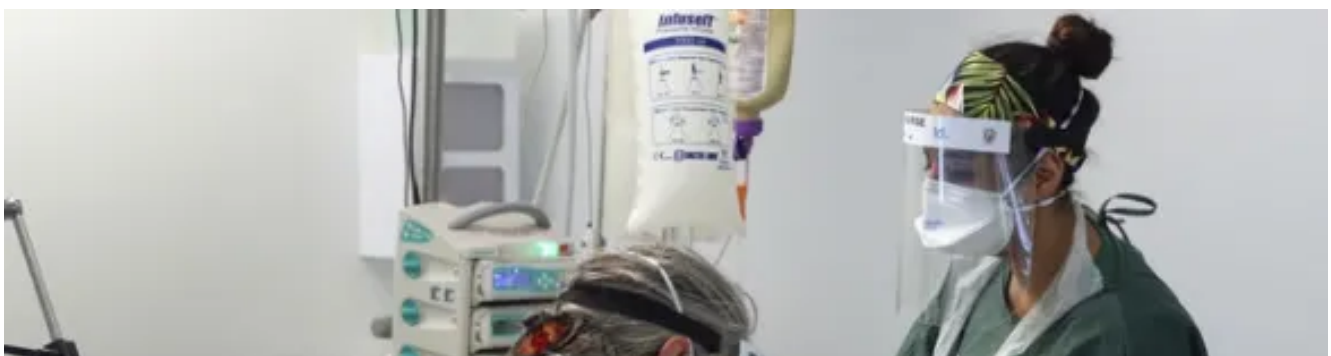
The scientists said efforts to support administration should be “urgently undertaken” to prevent more deaths.

Dexamethasone’s effectiveness against Covid was discovered as part of the RECOVERY trial, a UK government funded project designed in developing treatments.

Thousands of volunteers took part in the trial.

Dexamethasone is the only drug clinically proven to reduce mortality in hospitalised Covid patients. It is a cheap steroid already widely used across NHS hospitals and is readily available.

The drug reducing the death rates of patients on ventilators by around a third.





Many coronavirus patients in intensive care require ventilator support to breathe
Credit: Steve Parsons/PA

When scientists first revealed the drug's effectiveness in June, the **Boris Johnson hailed it as the "biggest breakthrough yet"** in the fight against coronavirus.

Sir Patrick Valance, the government's chief scientific adviser, at the time said: "The really exciting thing about this study is not only that it works, but it means that it can work across the world."

The SAGE documents released today will raise fears that the drug is not being properly administered here in the UK among senior figures in the NHS.

The report said: "(The) implementation of steroids therapy for COVID-19 in the UK has been slow and incomplete.

"Efforts to support the administration of these cheap, well-tolerated, readily available compounds to the right patients should be urgently undertaken, and the reasons for slow uptake evaluated."

NHS England and the Department for Health have both been approached for comment.

- **'Biggest breakthrough yet': Drug dexamethasone 'proven to reduce the risk of death' in some Covid-19 patients**
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