



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 28, 2020

20-024

### **Hawai'i Department of Health warns of potential adverse effects of using antimalaria drugs against COVID-19**

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) is warning everyone about the hazards and dangers of using non-approved drugs for COVID-19. Antimalarial drugs have been recently reported as possible treatments against COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

While hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine prescription medications have been used for treatment of malaria and certain inflammatory conditions, the efficacy for COVID-19 are unproven and potentially dangerous.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is no specific medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19 and a vaccine is not yet available.

“Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine can cause severe cardiac toxicity, and in high doses over a long duration, can cause retinal damage and lead to permanent blindness,” said Dr. Alvin Bronstein, DOH Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention System Branch Chief. “Individuals using these medications without physician supervision run serious risks of side effects and potential overdoses. Other medications are being touted, but nothing has been proven to be effective and may even do more harm than good.”

On March 25, the American Association of Poison Control Centers issued a warning about the dangers of using hydroxychloroquine to treat coronavirus, stating “While chloroquine/hydroxychloroquine has demonstrated benefits for multiple chronic autoimmune and rheumatologic diseases, the benefit for treatment of COVID-19 has not been definitively established. It is critical that any use of these medications is coordinated with a treating physician with full understanding of the potential risks and benefits.”

Hydroxychloroquine is used for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and lupus erythematosus. Chloroquine has been demonstrated to be effective for malaria, lupus and chronic rheumatoid arthritis, but has significant side effects, including gastrointestinal distress and potential permanent vision damage.

If you or someone you know has taken chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine and are experiencing adverse reactions, call 911, the Hawai'i Regional Poison Center (800-222-1222) or seek immediate medical care.

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