Coronavirus treatment

Trump calls coronavirus treatment he received a ‘cure’

Shares in manufacturers rise after US president praises experimental therapy

Donald Trump, shown in the video released on Wednesday, returned to the White House from hospital on Monday © via REUTERS

Kiran Stacey in Washington

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Donald Trump described one of the coronavirus treatments he received as a “cure” for the disease and said distributing the experimental therapy was now “much more important to me than the vaccine”.

In a video released on Wednesday evening, the president promised to authorise the antibody treatment — provided to him on a “compassionate use” basis by Regeneron of the US — for widespread use, even though companies that make it say it can only be used in specific cases.

Mr Trump, who returned to the White House from Walter Reed military hospital on Monday, said he saw his Covid-19 infection as “a blessing from God” because it had led him to the treatment. He said making it more widely available “is much more important to me than the vaccine”.

“They gave me Regeneron — other things, too — but I think this was the key. They gave me Regeneron and it was, like, unbelievable. I felt good immediately,” Mr Trump said. “They call them therapeutic, but to me it wasn’t just therapeutic, it made me better. I call that a cure.”

Regeneron and Eli Lilly both make versions of an antibody treatment, which is designed to neutralise the virus by blocking its entry into human cells. Neither company describes the treatment as a cure. Studies show it can cut viral load, improve symptoms and reduce medical visits.

> **If you’re in the hospital and you’re feeling really bad, I’ve organised it so you’re going to get them and you’re going to get them free**
>
> **Donald Trump**

Mr Trump’s comments sent shares in Regeneron up more than 3 per cent in after-hours trading, while those in Eli Lilly rose 1 per cent. Regeneron’s shares rose 7 per cent on Monday after it was revealed Mr Trump had received the treatment.

Neither company responded to a request for comment.

Eli Lilly has said that test volunteers taking a combination of two of its antibodies were 85 per cent less likely to be hospitalised or go to the emergency room compared with those taking a placebo. But the drug is designed for people with mild to moderate symptoms rather than those with more serious conditions.

Mr Trump also took the steroid dexamethasone and remdesivir, both of which are intended for patients at a later stage of the disease.

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Eli Lilly applied for an emergency authorisation of its drug earlier on Wednesday, saying it could help patients with a high risk for serious outcomes.

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Mr Trump said he had given his own approval for the drugs to be authorised on an emergency basis, though the Food and Drug Administration will make the final decision.

A spokesperson for the FDA said: "We do not confirm, deny or comment on product applications."

Mr Trump also said that when the treatments were approved, they would be given to patients for free, though he did not explain how they would be paid for. He said: "If you're in the hospital and you're feeling really bad, I've organised it so you're going to get them and you're going to get them free."

The president said his administration might not be able to approve a vaccine before November's election, after the FDA published tough new authorisation guidelines despite protests from the White House. The guidelines request that companies wait until at least half of their trial participants have been monitored for at least two months after their final injection before applying for authorisation.

Mr Trump, who accused the FDA on Tuesday night of launching a "political hit job" on him, said in his video: "I think we're going to have it before the election, but frankly the politics gets involved. That's OK, they want to play their games, it's going to be right after the election."

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