



# TOXTALKS

A BULLETIN FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHO MANAGE POISONED PATIENTS

Blue Ridge Poison Center

University of Virginia Health

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## Hydroxychloroquine

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has many searching for remedies ranging from prevention strategies to treatments. Unfortunately, some of these interventions can have significant toxicity if used without the approval of a medical professional. In particular, recent media coverage regarding clinical trials of hydroxychloroquine have prompted some to take hydroxychloroquine without a doctor's recommendation or in excess of an existing prescription.

Hydroxychloroquine (brand name Plaquenil, among others) is a medication with both antiparasitic and antiinflammatory actions. In the United States, it is approved for the treatment of malaria, systemic lupus erythematosus, and rheumatoid arthritis and it is on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines. Hydroxychloroquine is derived from chloroquine, an antimalarial medication whose use has declined in recent decades due to resistance and toxicity.

Hydroxychloroquine, though less toxic than chloroquine, has a narrow therapeutic index: that is, while it can be very effective in the treatment of certain conditions, side effects and toxicity may occur at even therapeutic doses. The severity of the toxicity depends on many complicated factors including patient's age and other medical conditions, other medications or supplements the patient may be taking, and the dose and regimen of the hydroxychloroquine among others. While these dangers prompt regulatory agencies to require physician prescriptions and close monitoring of patients in the United States, hydroxychloroquine or related substances remain available without a prescription in many countries and over the internet.

Hydroxychloroquine toxicity can involve almost every organ system.

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### NEWS AND NOTES:



Calls to U.S. poison centers about cleaning products and disinfectants has increased 20% since the start of the

Covid19 pandemic over the same time period in the past two years. Children under age 6 are most greatly affected, although there are adult cases as well.

[>>Read the CDC's MMWR report.](#)



The Blue Ridge Poison Center hotline is **fully operational** during

this time of quarantine. Our experts are standing by 24 hours a day, every day.  
1-800-222-1222.

**Free. Fast. Expert help.  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

**POISON  
Help**  
1-800-222-1222

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Effects may include headache, vision and/or hearing changes, hypokalemia, and QRS and/or QTc prolongation. In overdose - for example, when taken inappropriately without a doctor's supervision or in combination with other medications or with underlying medical issues - severe toxicity can include unstable arrhythmias (specifically, torsades de pointes due to QTc prolongation), seizures, and cardiovascular collapse resulting in death. This medication and substances related to it (including fish tank additives) should never be administered without a physician's recommendation.

For questions regarding hydroxychloroquine or related compounds, please contact the Blue Ridge Poison Center. Certified specialists in poison information and Medical Toxicologists are available 24 hours a day, every single day. Consultations are free and confidential. Call 1-800-222-1222. The poison center can provide assistance in the evaluation and potentially the management of patients. Additionally, cases reported to all United States poison centers are anonymously uploaded to a national database to aid in the treatment of other patients and to direct public health and safety awareness campaigns nationally and internationally.

References for this article are available upon request.

The Blue Ridge Poison Center receives funding from University of Virginia Health, the Virginia Department of Health, and the U.S. Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA). We are accredited by the American Association of Poison Control Centers. We've been proudly serving the Commonwealth since 1978.

Poison safety tips, free materials, & more:

