

Michigan company thinks it may have found a coronavirus treatment drug

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A Michigan company has developed a version of a drug that may be effective in treating coronavirus patients.

SciTech Development, LLC is a local oncology drug development company that has created a new delivery system for a drug that has previously been used as anticancer therapy.

The drug, nanoFenretinide, is a new version of the drug fenretinide that is more soluble and can be put into the body at higher concentrations. The original drug, fenretinide, was created by Johnson and Johnson more than 30 years ago and has been used to help treat breast cancer patients, said SciTech Chief Medical Officer Brian Leyland-Jones.

Fenretinide itself has been approved for clinical studies and proven to be a relatively safe drug in treating cancer patients, by differentiating between healthy and cancerous cells, said SciTech President and Cofounder Earle Holsapple.

The drug has antiviral activities as well, but is relatively insoluble, which makes it harder for the body to absorb, Leyland-Jones said.

The new version, nanoFenretinide, has the ability to put more of the drug into the body without increased toxicity. Fenretinide has shown antiviral activity in preclinical trials against similar viruses including MERs, SARs and HIV, according to SciTech.

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"What SciTech did was develop a delivery system, which is basically just like an onion — it has a layer of lipid, layer of water, layer of lipid," Leyland-Jones said. "This increases significantly the amount of drug you can get into the body... it significantly enhances the delivery of the drug while maintaining low toxicity."

The new drug would not be a COVID-19 cure, but can help suppress inflammation and the body's reaction to the virus that triggers fever and chills.

"I do not think that this is going to be curative, but I think it would be adjunctive to every other treatment out there because of its efficacy and low toxicity," Leyland-Jones said.

A proposal for the clinical trial has been submitted to the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) of Health and Human Services. Once the company has received funding from BARDA and approval from the Food and Drug

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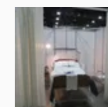
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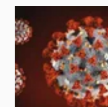
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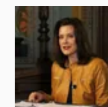
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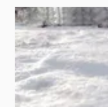
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Administration, the clinical trial will roll out in Michigan and Chicago.

FDA already has the background on the original drug, Fenretinide, and has an expedited review program in place to help meet the high need for this type of drug, Holsapple said.

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The initial phase of the trial is expected to be completed in nine to 10 weeks once it is approved, Leyland-Jones said. The trial is designed to take coronavirus patients who have just been admitted to the hospital and hopefully prevent them from needing the ventilator at all.

"The whole idea on the trial is to take people as soon as they come in to the hospital and prevent them from going on to a ventilator," Leyland-Jones said.

If the trials go well, the drug could be put into production and distributed relatively rapidly, Leyland-Jones said.

"We are all ready. We are itching to go," Leyland-Jones said. "There are so many deaths, so many people dying unnecessarily of it every day. Whatever we can do to prevent this."

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