

NZ's Pharmac to fund tocilizumab for moderate-to-severe cases of COVID-19

New Zealand's Pharmaceutical Management Agency (Pharmac) has announced that it will fund the rheumatoid arthritis immunosuppressant drug, tocilizumab [Roche], for cases of moderate to severe COVID-19 from 1 October 2021.

To date, Pharmac has funded tocilizumab for more than 30 patients through their exceptions decision-making processes for COVID-19. This new funding will mean that access to tocilizumab for COVID-19 will be available via the Pharmaceutical Schedule following compliance with Section 25 of Medicines Act 1981, meaning prescribers will no longer need to apply directly to Pharmac for each patient and ensure timely access to treatment.

The decision to fund tocilizumab came after consultation with District Health Boards (DHBs), the Ministry of Health, and Roche NZ. However, Roche NZ have advised Pharmac that they will not be able to supply contracted tocilizumab to New Zealand for three months from October.

"We are working closely with Roche NZ, and DHB hospitals, to help manage stock to ensure there is sufficient supplies of tocilizumab to maintain treatment for priority patients during the gap in supply (October 2021 – January 2022). We are also funding a new alternative treatment for those with rheumatoid arthritis called upadacitinib", said Pharmac's Director of Operations, Lisa Williams.