

## Study: Throat spray, anti-malaria drug reduce Covid risk

CLARACHONG

Using a throat spray or consuming the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine has been found to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection in healthy individuals in areas with high transmission rates.

A local study of more than 3,000 healthy young migrant workers who were quarantined in Tuas South Dormitory in May last year found that taking a povidone-iodine throat spray three times a day or the oral drug hydroxychloroquine once daily reduced the number of those infected by Sars-CoV-2 by more than 20 per cent.

The team of clinician-scientists from the National University Health System (NUHS) studied 3,037 asymptomatic healthy young men with an average age of 33 who produced a negative serology test result indicating no prior exposure to the virus.

These dormitory residents were mostly from India and Bangladesh. They were split into five groups, each of which was given a different set of medicines for six weeks.

The control group was given vitamin C, the second group zinc and vitamin C, the third the povidone-iodine throat spray, while the fourth received hydroxychloroquine, and the last group received the drug ivermectin. At that time, Covid-19 clusters were still rampant in Singapore's dormitories, and residents were isolated or quarantined in their rooms.

After six weeks, blood samples were collected and analysed for their antibody response to Sars-CoV-2. The researchers found that 70 per cent of those in the vitamin C group had been infected, while 46 per cent of those in the povidone-iodine throat spray group and 49 per cent of workers in the hydroxychloroquine group were infected with the virus.

The team's findings have been published in the *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*.

The throat spray can be bought over the counter at pharmacies while hydroxychloroquine will require a doctor's prescription.

Common side effects of hydroxychloroquine include headaches, dizziness, diarrhoea, stomach cramps and vomiting. These symptoms may be reduced when the tablets are taken with food.

chongcjy@sph.com.sg