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WHO prequalifies first monoclonal antibody 'tocilizumab' to treat COVID-19

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So far, the product has been authorized mostly for the treatment of arthritis in about 120 countries worldwide

Aiming to increase access to recommended treatments for COVID-19, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has added tocilizumab, a monoclonal antibody, to its list of prequalified treatments for COVID-19.

To date, six COVID-19 treatments have been prequalified by WHO, including the three presentations (three vials, each with a different quantity) of the product prequalified recently.

The three prequalified products are manufactured by the originator company, Roche, but the listings should pave the way for more companies coming forward to seek WHO prequalification, thereby increasing the number of quality-assured products and creating competition leading to potentially lower prices. The prequalification of these products will also facilitate low- and middle-income countries' authorization of them as COVID treatments.

Tocilizumab is a monoclonal antibody that inhibits the Interleukin-6 (IL-6) receptor. Interleukin-6 induces an inflammatory response and is found in high levels in patients critically ill with COVID-19.

WHO recommends tocilizumab only for patients diagnosed with severe or critical COVID-19. It should be administered by a healthcare worker in a monitored clinical setting along with the current standard of care for COVID-19, which includes oxygen, corticosteroids, and other medications.