

## Home cure for COVID? Pfizer testing a pill that offers promise

At two anonymous Pfizer buildings, one in the U.S. and one in Belgium, a remarkable experiment is under way. Up to 60 volunteers, all clean-living adults aged between 18 and 60, are being given the first pill specifically designed to stop Covid-19.

If the trial is successful, it is just possible a home cure for Covid-19 will become available later this year.

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The molecule being tested is a bespoke antiviral code-named PF-07321332. Classed as a “protease inhibitor”, it has been formulated to attack the “spine” of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and stop it replicating in our nose, throats and lungs. It was protease inhibitors that turned the tide on the spread of HIV in the UK and around the world. Now researchers hope they may be on the brink of a similar pandemic-busting breakthrough.

“If they have moved to this stage they will be quietly optimistic,” said Penny Ward, a visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King’s College London.

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Prof Ward has also warned of more practical problems. The antiviral Tamiflu that she helped create costs about pounds 25 a course and is still not widely prescribed in the UK against seasonal flu because of its price tag, despite some 20,000 people dying of the disease in Britain each year.

For Pfizer and PF-07321332, it is a “race against time”, she said.

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