

New Treatment Available for High Risk COVID-19 Patients

by Libby Allison

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In an effort to prevent COVID-19 hospital admissions, OSF HealthCare is now offering a cutting edge monoclonal immunotherapy infusion. Bamlanivimab, or BAM, is approved for high risk adult and pediatric COVID-19 positive patients with mild to moderate symptoms.

The laboratory-made antibody mimics a naturally occurring one, which is known to fight off the virus that causes COVID-19.

“BAM is a monoclonal antibody, and antibodies are protein molecules our body makes to fight foreign invaders, explained Mark Meeker, D.O., vice president of physician

services, OSF HealthCare. “So we isolate this antibody that we know fights the COVID virus, and we’re able to reproduce it in the lab and then use it to treat patients as though they made the antibody themselves.”

The Eli Lilly drug received an emergency use authorization – known as an EUA – by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in November. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the FDA has issued many EUAs for tests and treatments.

“We were able to take a small group of people, take a look at them – these high risk people – and show that they ended up in the hospital less often, show that they had no major side effects, and based on that we got the emergency use authorization for this specific group of people,” said Dr. Meeker.

BAM is now being administered in specially designated outpatient infusion sites throughout the OSF HealthCare Ministry. Patients who qualify for BAM have been found to be at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness, and might need hospitalization if untreated.

BAM is most effective when given early, and needs to be administered within 10 days of the onset of symptoms. BAM is not intended for routine use in the management of COVID-19, and is not approved for hospitalized COVID-19 patients.

“My hope is that we see a drop in hospitalization within these high risk categories,” said Brian Curtis, M.D., vice president, clinical specialty services, OSF HealthCare. “The categories that the EUA has selected are the patients that we have seen historically over the last eight months have a higher risk of having a bad outcome from COVID, having a more prolonged course, and getting admitted to the hospital. And so that’s why we’re targeting this population, not a general population.”

“Other diseases aren’t going away because COVID is here,” added Dr. Meeker. “So people still need treatment for other illnesses. People still need surgeries. They still need procedures. They need screenings. They get sick with other diseases. So we need capacity to take care of them. We can’t afford for our hospitals to totally fill up with COVID, because then we can’t take care of other people. So I am really, really hopeful that this antibody indeed lowers the progression of disease in this high risk population so we can keep our hospitals out of full capacity.”

Qualifying patients need to be at least 12 years old and weigh 88 pounds. Adult patients must be 65 or older or have another risk factor, including:

- Body mass index (BMI) greater than 35
- Chronic kidney disease

- Diabetes
- Immunosuppressive disease
- Immunosuppressive treatment

Patients 55 and older with heart disease, lung disease or who are undergoing immunosuppressive treatment also qualify for BAM. The qualifications for pediatric COVID-19 patients over the age of 12 include:

- Body mass index (BMI) above the 85th percentile for age
- Sickle cell disease
- Cardiovascular disease
- Neurodevelopmental disease
- Use of a medical dependent device

If you are COVID-19 positive and want to know if BAM is available to you, contact your primary care physician.