

## AOTW: Merck Covid Pill the Final Game Changer to End the Pandemic?

October 1, 2021

Good morning,

After a down month for major stock indices around the world (Canada's TSX among the better performers, down 2.5%, the S&P lost nearly 5%) in the face of some near term headwinds (US debt ceiling concerns, inflation persisting and slow vaccine rollout in some parts of the world), we got some good news Thursday night from US drug maker Merck, as they announced early results from the clinical trial testing their novel Covid-19 oral antiviral drug, molnupiravir:

"At the interim analysis, molnupiravir reduced the risk of hospitalization or death by approximately 50%," Merck said in a news release. "7.3% of patients who received molnupiravir were either hospitalized or died through Day 29 following randomization (28/385), compared with 14.1% of placebo treated patients (53,377). Through Day 29, no deaths were reported in patients who received molnupiravir, as compared to 8 deaths in patients who received placebo."

Bearing in mind the sample size in this stage of the trial that was testing for drug efficacy was not large (775 patients), earlier phases of trials tested larger numbers of patients with new Covid infections for safety. The results of this latest phase of trials were so noticeably positive, the trial was stopped early and emergency use authorization is being sought by Merck from the FDA.

"It exceeded what I thought the drug might be able to do in this clinical trial," said Dean Li, the vice-president of Merck research. "When you see a 50% reduction in hospitalization or death that's a substantial clinical impact."

"Prof Peter Horby of the University of Oxford, who co-led the UK's [Recovery trial](#) which identified the first life-saving drug to treat Covid, said the drug "ticks a lot of boxes" – in particular it comes in pill form and appears to have a good safety profile. "

It will be interesting to see if unvaccinated Covid patients who worry about the "rushed" approval of Covid vaccines, will be willing to accept this as a treatment. We've all heard a few stories by now of unvaccinated Covid patients expressing regret for not taking a vaccine as they fell very ill with the virus. Will they be more willing to try a newly-approved drug to improve their odds of recovery?

Regardless, the more tools we have at our disposal to prevent terrible patient outcomes from Covid (be it vaccines or antiviral pills like this one), the better. This is another pathway to this pandemic becoming an endemic that we can learn to live with. For this guy, the sooner I can remove my mask at a sporting event, concert or minor hockey arena full of fully vaxxed fans, the better.

Enjoy the weekend...for those in the Ottawa area, dust off those umbrellas for Saturday, it appears a monsoon is headed our way.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/01/covid-antiviral-pill-halves-hospitalisations-and-deaths-maker-says>

## Trevor M. Johnson, CIM, FMA

Financial Advisor & Portfolio Manager

**Contego Wealth Management of Raymond James Ltd.**

750-45 O'Connor Street | Ottawa, ON | K1P 1A4



613.369.4660 | Toll Free: 1.866.552.0889 | Fax: 613.369.4699

[www.raymondjames.ca/contegowealthmanagement/](http://www.raymondjames.ca/contegowealthmanagement/)

Personal Assistant:

Karol Phillips | Financial Advisor Associate |



613.369.4662

[karol.phillips@raymondjames.ca](mailto:karol.phillips@raymondjames.ca)



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