

The BIRD Recommendation on the Use of Ivermectin for Covid-19:

Executive Summary

BIRD

British
Ivermectin
Recommendation
Development



Proceedings and conclusions of the British Ivermectin Recommendation Development meeting held on the 20th February 2021 in Bath, United Kingdom.

The BIRD Ethos

The ethos of the BIRD process was that of scientific rigour and transparency in the spirit of international collaboration towards a common goal – that of saving lives.

“Research is essential in the context of public health emergencies. The primary purpose of such research is to advance public health, prevent illness and save lives. Every researcher that engages in generation of information related to a public health emergency or acute public health event with the potential to progress to an emergency has the fundamental moral obligation to share preliminary results once they are adequately quality controlled for release. The onus is on the researcher, and the funder supporting the work, to disseminate information through pre-publication mechanisms, unless publication can occur immediately using post-publication peer review processes.”

World Health Organization statement on ‘Global norms for sharing data and results during public health emergencies’, after the Ebola emergency (2015)

Introduction

A global health emergency that causes significant mortality and morbidity with serious economic and societal consequences is of the highest priority. Global deaths from covid-19 have reached 2.4 million. No specific treatments are recommended for routine use in all covid-19 infections, and while the population of developed countries will eventually be given the choice of having a vaccine, this choice may not be afforded to people in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) for a long time.

The antiparasitic medicine ivermectin, which is widely available in LMICs, has been tested in numerous clinical trials of prevention and treatment of covid-19 with promising results. A large body of evidence on ivermectin use in covid-19 had thus accumulated, which required urgent review by health professionals and other stakeholders to determine whether it could inform clinical practice in the UK and elsewhere. More specifically, answers were needed to the following priority questions: (i) For people with covid-19 infection, does

ivermectin compared with placebo or no ivermectin improve health outcomes? and (ii) for people at higher risk of covid-19 infection, does ivermectin compared with placebo or no ivermectin improve health outcomes?

On the 20th of February 2021, the British Ivermectin Recommendation Development (BIRD) meeting was convened in Bath, United Kingdom, to evaluate the evidence on ivermectin use for the prevention and treatment of covid-19. Evidence to address the priority questions was evaluated by a panel of clinical experts and other stakeholders in the form of a DECIDE evidence-to-decision framework, the gold standard tool for developing clinical practice guidelines.

Target audience

The recommendation in this document are aimed at informing national- and local-level health policies and clinical protocols on covid-19 prevention and treatment. As such, the target audience includes health care professionals,

implementers, national and local policymakers, patients and the public.

Recommendation development methods

This recommendation on ivermectin for covid-19 was developed using the standard procedures for guideline development as described in the *World Health Organization Handbook for Guideline Development (2014)*. Briefly, these procedures include: (i) Identification of priority questions and outcomes; (ii) Evidence retrieval and synthesis; (iii) Assessment of the evidence; (iv) Formulation of the recommendations; and (v) Planning for implementation, dissemination, impact evaluation and updating. The Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) approach for quantitative evidence was applied, to ensure the quality of the scientific evidence that forms the basis of the recommendation. An up-to-date systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted to prepare the evidence underpinning each of the priority questions.

The BIRD panel of international experts and stakeholders convened to review and make judgements on the evidence and other relevant considerations for each of the following criteria:

intervention effects, values, resources, equity, acceptability, and feasibility. The intervention effect criterion refers to the benefits and harms associated with ivermectin for covid-19. The values criterion refers to the importance that those affected by covid-19 assign to the outcomes associated with ivermectin. The resources criterion refers to the resource implications (costs and cost-effectiveness) of ivermectin implementation. The equity criterion considers the health equity implications associated with ivermectin. How acceptable ivermectin would be to relevant stakeholders, including health care workers and patients, and how feasible it would be to implement were also judged by the panel.

Using an electronic survey link, the panel made judgements on these different decision-making criteria which were recorded in a summary table. The

summary of the panel judgements then informed the formulation of the draft recommendation, which was guided by the BIRD Steering Group. Possible recommendations included:

- A recommendation in favour of the use of ivermectin for covid-19
- A recommendation not in favour of the use of ivermectin for covid-19
- A recommendation in favour of the use of ivermectin in certain contexts, such as a research context or specific populations or settings.

For the purpose of transparency, the meeting was recorded and live-streamed. The public was invited to participate through a survey link on a streaming channel. With this online survey they were able to make judgements on the evidence as part of a public participation and involvement initiative (PPI).

The BIRD recommendation

The British Ivermectin Recommendation Development panel recommends ivermectin for the prevention and treatment of covid-19 to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with

covid-19 infection and to prevent covid-19 infection among those at higher risk.

To ensure that the recommendation is understood and applied in practice, the contributing experts provided additional remarks where necessary. Whilst the panel agreed that ivermectin should be immediately rolled out, they suggested that further randomized trials of ivermectin for covid-19 within individual country settings would be of value to investigate optimal dosage (dose, duration) and combination treatments according to covid-19 severity and risk factors. The overwhelming majority of the panel agreed that placebo control trials are unlikely to be ethical unless conducted among individuals who are uncertain whether or not to use ivermectin. The panel noted that Ivermectin for human use is given orally. Prevention and treatment protocols can be derived from the clinical trials and numerous protocols already developed by expert clinicians in the field. Many of the expert protocols for the treatment and prevention of covid-19 also include vitamin D3, vitamin C and zinc. The panel also suggested that the public would

benefit from general advice on how to keep healthy and to boost immunity.

Implementation considerations

The BIRD panel also considered how to implement the recommendation. They agreed that policymakers will need to address with urgency the authorization, manufacture/import, and distribution of ivermectin to guarantee supply. The panel also indicated the need to raise awareness among frontline workers and the public about the benefits of ivermectin.

Additional considerations by the panel included the postal distribution of covid-19 home kits that include ivermectin and possibly also nutritional supplements, such as zinc and vitamins, to reduce the pressure on health services. For pregnant and lactating women, the panel noted some uncertainty with regard to the safety of ivermectin and suggested that pregnant and lactating women should be encouraged to consult their health care practitioners before using ivermectin. This caution also applies to parents and carers, as ivermectin may not be suitable for young children under five. Finally, for prophylaxis during foreign travel, the

panel considered that pre-travel advisory clinics could control the dispensing of the medication depending on individual risk factors and covid-19 prevalence in the area of travel.

Dissemination of the recommendation

The Steering Group undertook to communicate and disseminate the recommendation to policy makers, decision makers, regulatory bodies, and implementers as soon as possible in the interest of expediting implementation. These bodies include the World Health Organization, the United States National Institutes of Health, Public Health England, among others.