

Donald Trump has finished his COVID-19 treatment, but has he recovered?

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Donald Trump said he felt incredible after receiving a cocktail of drugs to help fight COVID-19. (AP: Alex Brandon)

Donald Trump has been given the all-clear to return to public engagements this weekend, after his physician said the US President had completed his treatment for COVID-19.

On Friday morning Australian time, White House doctor Sean Conley said the President was "stable" and there were no signs his illness had progressed.

"Overall, he has responded extremely well to treatment without evidence on examination of adverse therapeutic effects," his letter said.

To fight the disease, Mr Trump was given a mix of experimental medications as well as accepted treatments, including [a steroid called dexamethasone](#).

The doctor concluded that on his current trajectory, the President would be able to go back out into the world on Saturday, Washington time.

Mr Trump has also posted videos of himself since he returned to the White House earlier this week,

Key points:

- Donald Trump will return to public engagements 10 days after he confirmed his diagnosis
- Medical experts say 10 days is reasonable time to recover from a moderate case of COVID-19
- While Mr Trump says the cocktail of drugs he took "cured" him, it is unclear what effect they had on his recovery

[describing the medication he has been on as a "cure" for COVID-19.](#)

"I went into the hospital a week ago, I was very sick and I took this medicine and it was incredible, I could have walked out the following day," he said.

But some medical experts have raised concerns the treatments Mr Trump has been taking could be masking how he is really feeling.

What happens once the treatments stop?

While there have been some [conflicting messages around how long Mr Trump has had the virus](#), the President [confirmed he tested positive on Friday last week AEST.](#)

If he were to return to public engagements this Sunday, it would be 10 days since his diagnosis.

Part of the President's cocktail of treatments was dexamethasone — a widely available and powerful steroid which has been around for 60 years.

In a radio interview conducted after his doctor said Mr Trump had completed his course of therapy, [the President said he was still taking the drug.](#)

"I'm back because I'm a perfect physical specimen and I'm extremely young," the 74-year-old said.

Dexamethasone dampens the inflammatory response which can damage the body and cause respiratory failure in people who have severe COVID-19.

Clinical trials found deaths for ventilated patients [dropped by about one-third with dexamethasone treatment.](#)

But it is less clear how long people with milder COVID-19 symptoms should stay on dexamethasone and what effect it may have.




Rob Davidson, an emergency physician from West Michigan in the United States, took to social media to outline his concerns.

Kayleigh McEnany @P...
US government account

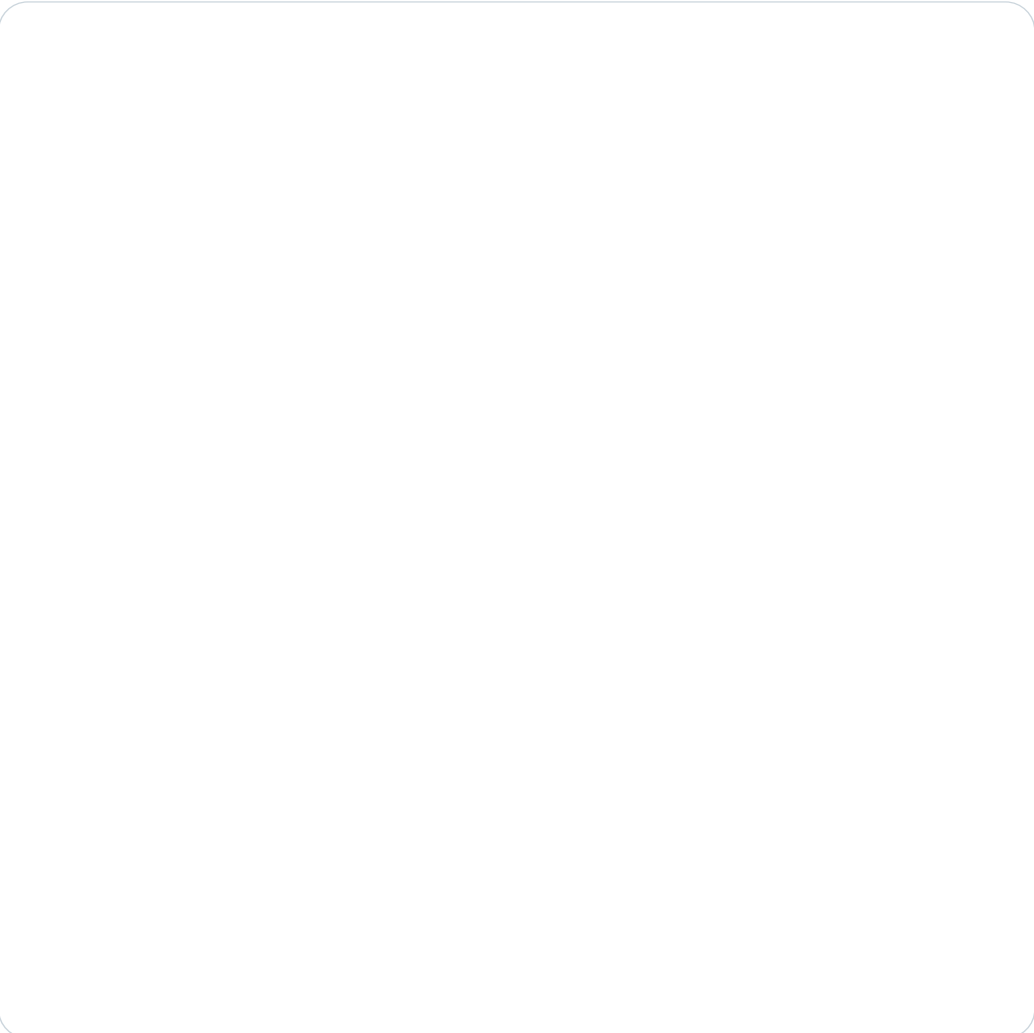
A Thursday evening update from President [@realDonaldTrump](#)'s physician:


10:02 AM · Oct 9, 2020



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 **Dr. Rob Davidson #WearAMask** 
@DrRobDavidson 

The president says he's found a miracle "cure" for [#COVID19](#). As an ER doctor treating this virus, please listen to experts, not a politician. Here's the truth about Regeneron, and why [@realDonaldTrump](#) might feel so good >>>



10:47 AM · Oct 8, 2020 

 4.1K  See the latest COVID-19 information on Twitter

"I have had to take [dexamethasone] for altitude sickness and asthma and it makes you feel a million bucks, it makes you feel on top of the world," he said.

"It also impairs executive function and can be hard to focus. This is well known."

Elizabeth Hartland, from the Hudson Institute for Medical Research in Victoria, said dexamethasone was a powerful drug with strong side effects on mood.

"Donald Trump is a very confident person anyway so it's a bit hard to tell how much is him or how much is dexamethasone," she said.

"This ebullience that he has, could be the drug, depending on the dose."

She said COVID-19 patients tended to receive a lower dose of the steroid than patients who were given it for procedures like brain surgery.

The director of respiratory medicine at Eastern Health and Monash University, Francis Thien, said while dexamethasone was recognised to have psychological side effects, fewer than half of patients experienced them.

"It can make you a bit hyper and disturb your sleep and can either elevate your mood — make you manic — or make people depressed," he said.

"Those are all known side effects of steroids, but most people don't have those side effects."

The recommended course of treatment for the drug for COVID-19 is up to 10 days, based on the patient's response to it.

Because dexamethasone is prescribed to prevent the immune system fatally overreacting to coronavirus, Professor Hartland said the drug could actually slow down the process of clearing the virus from the body's system.

"If you suppress the inflammatory response, some people have found that viral clearance takes longer, which is not ideal," she said.

"This is not a drug you want to be on long term."

Peter Collingnon, an infectious diseases expert from the Australian National University, said coming off dexamethasone could make people feel much worse.

"If you have been on a higher dose, you feel really terrible," he said.

"Normally we would taper off the dose."

He said steroids like dexamethasone were not meant to be taken for a long time.

"If you give the drug to people, they might feel better as it affects your psyche and you get a high from it, but it doesn't make any difference to the disease," he said.

"There is no evidence for dexamethasone in people with mild COVID-19.

"It can induce high blood pressure, diabetes and even secondary bacterial infections."

[For the latest news on the coronavirus pandemic read our live blog.](#)

A COVID-19 'anecdote' not a cure

Mr Trump also had a number of doses of an experimental antibody treatment [known as REGN-COV2](#), from a company called Regeneron Pharmaceuticals.

It is designed to produce antibodies to stimulate the body to fight off the virus.

It is still in clinical trials, but Mr Trump said the "powerful" drug would be made available to Americans immediately and for free, after it had made him feel "incredible".



Dr Davidson said the drug had only been studied on 275 patients, and it was not a cure for COVID-19, as Mr Trump had described it.

"We don't know if it works, we don't know about patient outcomes because it hasn't been studied enough," he said.

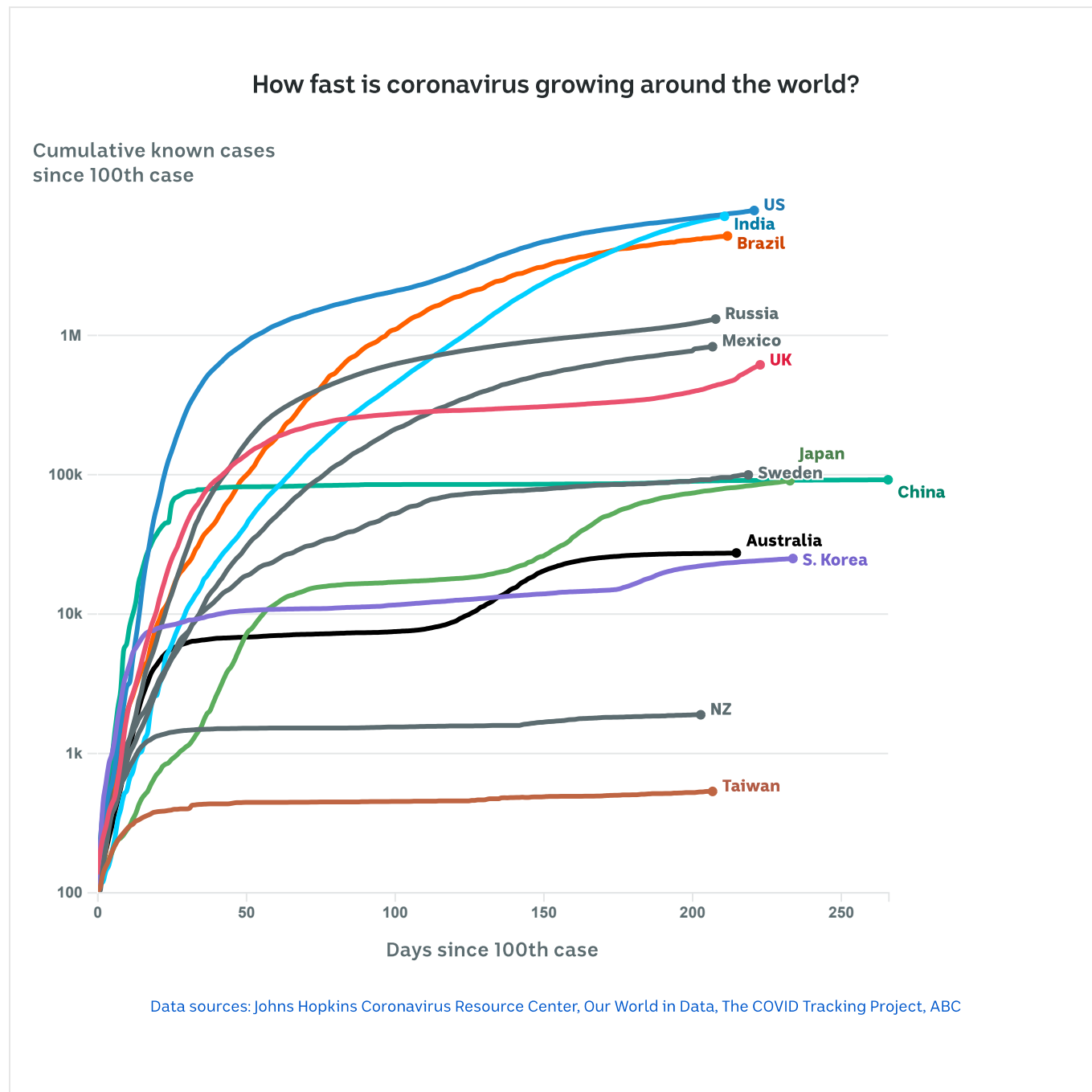
He said it was unclear what role each treatment had played in making the President feel well again.

"Frankly, he is an anecdote, because he is one person who took this drug, but he's also getting dexamethasone."

Dr Thien said he it was not unusual to recover from COVID-19 10 days after diagnosis.

"He's certainly not like a miraculous recovery. This would be within the average recovery time at the mild to moderate end of people who need to be hospitalised," he said.

He said most of the time the body cured itself, with drugs helping to speed it along.



"If he hadn't had [REGN-COV2], would he have gotten better? Probably. Would he have gotten better as quickly? Maybe not, but this is what treatments are," he said.

"So do you say that because he got better this quickly, that it's a cure? Depends on how you want to use the word 'cure'."

Professor Collignon said usually people would isolate 10 to 14 days from when they were diagnosed.

"You would want to see that people are better and that they have had no symptoms for at least a week," Professor Collignon said.

"Four or five days ago, he said he was back to normal but I would wait a week and see."



Donald Trump says he will make the experimental drug he was given freely available to Americans. (AP: Alex Brandon)

Professor Collignon said while it was probable that Mr Trump would not relapse, it was by no means a certainty.

"You have to be very careful. [Look at Boris Johnson, he looked quite well and got quite sick](#). I would think if he is fine for the next four or five days then he will get away with it," he said.

Professor Hartland warned the drugs Mr Trump had taken did not make him "immune to reinfection" from COVID-19.

"Only his immune system can do that," she said.

"He has probably made an immune response to the virus but whether it is protective or not remains to be seen."

Read more about coronavirus:

- [Who in Victoria needs to wear a mask and when](#)
- [Coronavirus survives on common surfaces longer than previously thought, say scientists](#)

Does Australia use these drugs for COVID-19?

Mr Trump was also given [remdesivir, a broad-spectrum antiviral drug](#) designed to disable viruses from making copies of themselves.

Australia was one of the first countries to approve the use of it for adults and adolescents hospitalised with severe COVID-19 symptoms.

Dexamethasone is also available for Australians with COVID-19 but is restricted to patients who really need it.

REGN-COV2 is not yet available in Australia, and is unlikely to be for some time.

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