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### Iowa bill advances that would allow ivermectin over-the-counter access



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- Iowa Republicans are considering a bill to allow over-the-counter access to the anti-parasitic drug ivermectin.
- Medical professionals and the FDA have warned against general human use of ivermectin, citing health risks.
- The proposed legislation would require pharmacists to dispense the drug without a prescription and grant them legal immunity.

Some Iowa Republicans are split on a proposal advancing in the Iowa Legislature that would allow over-the-counter access to the anti-parasitic drug ivermectin, embraced by vaccine skeptics as a treatment for COVID-19 but unproven by studies.

The Food and Drug Administration has authorized ivermectin's use in livestock but not for general human use to treat COVID-19, though the agency has signed off on prescribing human formulations of ivermectin for parasitic infections and certain skin conditions.

Iowa House Republicans advanced [House File 2056](#) after a subcommittee hearing on Thursday, Jan. 22, moving forward a proposal that mirrors other states' push to expand over-the-counter access to the drug through pharmacist-led standing orders.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more states — primarily led by Republicans — have passed laws allowing pharmacists to dispense ivermectin without a prescription, going against FDA warnings about its use for COVID-19 treatment and prevention.

Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds' office says she also plans to pursue legislation allowing over-the-counter access to ivermectin, but her proposal has not been unveiled.

She did not mention it in her Jan. 13 Condition of the State address but [told Radio Iowa](#) she had "talked to people that have used it" and asked to make it available over the counter.

"There are some states that are already doing that," Reynolds said. "... We'll give the Legislature and Iowans a chance to weigh in."

The [FDA says](#) it has received multiple reports of patients who have needed to seek medical attention after self-medicating with ivermectin intended for animals. It can cause low blood pressure, vomiting, dizziness, seizures and death.

Tennessee was the first state to allow the drug's sale over the counter without a prescription.

Rep. Eddie Andrews, R-Johnston, who is running for Iowa governor, voted to advance the bill, along with Rep. Brett Barker, R-Nevada, who initially aired objections but later signed onto it after the subcommittee. Rep. Austin Baeth, D-Des Moines, voted against it.

Baeth, a physician, called the bill "mandated medical malpractice" and said making such a drug available over the counter for people to try "completely undermines the reason why we have a drug prescription process in the first place."

He said lawmakers should consider the ethical and moral situations facing medical professionals when they know the drug may negatively interact with other medications a patient takes.

"Will we have blood thinners over the counter? Will we have fentanyl over the counter? Where do we stop this where we have people experimenting on themselves?" Baeth said. "And it's mandated medical malpractice because this law would be having a group of politicians, non-doctors, forcing our state medical director to write a prescription when it would be malpractice for any doctor to write a prescription for this to be used carte blanche for any reason."

Andrews said the assumption is that people are regularly seeing medical providers who could routinely monitor their health while on the medication.

### **What would the House bill do?**

The Iowa House bill requires the medical director of the Iowa Department of Public Health to establish a standing order authorizing a pharmacist to dispense hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin to patients who are at least age 18.

Under the legislation, the pharmacist must give the manufacturer's label instructions for the drug when it's dispensed. Pharmacists would be barred from requiring patients get a prescription or schedule an appointment before the drug is dispensed. They also could not keep records of the transactions.

It would give pharmacists immunity from criminal and civil liability over damages stemming from a patient's use of ivermectin.

Reps. John Wills, R-Spirit Lake; Charley Thomson, R-Charles City; and Mark Thompson, R-Clarion; co-sponsored the measure.

### **How much of a priority is the bill for Republicans?**

House Speaker Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, said there may be enough interest among House Republicans, who hold a supermajority of 67 members in the 100-member chamber, to "continue this conversation" but couldn't say how much of a priority it was for his caucus.

Barker raised "strong concerns" with the proposal.

"To me, it really hones in on two words: 'shall dispense,'" Barker said. "Pharmacists have a corresponding responsibility to ensure the safety and appropriateness of every prescription that they provide to a patient. That's the core of the professional autonomy of the profession."

After agreeing to move the bill forward, Barker said he was willing to listen to changes his colleagues may propose but would not vote for the measure as written. He said Andrews agreed to think about ways to alter the bill in the coming days to satisfy concerns.

"It's unusual for me to kill one of my colleagues' bills in a subcommittee, especially if they want to have continued conversations and potentially make some changes," Barker told the Des Moines Register. "So out of just professional courtesy, I'll listen to what he has to say."

House Minority Leader Brian Meyer, D-Des Moines, called the bill "completely irrelevant."

"People are worried about affordability," Meyer said. "They're worried about how do they send their kids to school and these guys are worried about ivermectin. I mean, this is ridiculous. I mean, we've got to focus on other things."

### **Medical groups oppose legislation over health risks**

Medical professionals resoundingly opposed the legislation at a subcommittee hearing for its risks to patient health, while supporters advocated for "medical freedom" to take the drug.

Iowa Pharmacy Association President Wes Pilkington, a pharmacy owner from Evansdale, said pharmacists routinely dispense ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine when they're appropriate for an individual patient. He raised concerns with mandating pharmacists dispense the drugs over their legal and ethical obligations to evaluate patient safety.

"Pharmacists are not vending machines," Pilkington said. "We're licensed health care professionals whose role is to ensure medications are safe and appropriate before they reach the patient. ... This legislation effectively tells pharmacists that our clinical judgment is optional."

Seth Brown, a lobbyist representing the Iowa Medical Society, the Iowa Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Rheumatology Association of Iowa, said those organizations all voiced concerns about setting a precedent that takes away clinical oversight and judgment and would have long-term adverse effects on patients.

"There needs to be clinical oversight and regular check-ins to make sure that it's being used properly and there are some medications where OTC use is proper," Brown said. "These are not those medications."

Lindsay Maher, with a group that organizes against vaccine requirements and health mandates called Informed Choice Iowa, cheered the legislation and said federal regulators have played "gatekeeper" to block over-the-counter access to human formulations of ivermectin but Iowans should have a choice.

"Many people in rural and underserved communities would have greater access if this was something they could purchase over the counter," Maher said.

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