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## Expert: HIV Meds Might Help Combat Coronavirus

 by Kilian Melloy  
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An expert in SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - says that existing medicines might help combat the deadly new strain of coronavirus that has gripped China and sparked global fears of a pandemic. Specifically, he referenced a combination of two medicines currently used to manage HIV.

Rolf Hilgenfeld, who worked to counteract the SARS outbreak of 2002 and 2003, told German publication *Die Zeit* that although there is no currently known, approved medicine for the new viral outbreak, previous research into medicines to fight coronavirus showed "a combination product consisting of two substances proved to be particularly promising in the first clinical tests," and added that the combination consisted of

"lopinavir and ritonavir."

"These are actually medicines for HIV," Hilgenfeld noted.

When *Die Zeit* asked him to clarify that, indeed, a combination of HIV drugs might prove effective in countering the deadly new outbreak, Hilgenfeld replied in the affirmative, and added:

***"Especially in outbreak situations like now, people regularly try to rededicate drugs that have already been approved. This has the advantage that these agents have already been extensively tested on humans and can therefore be considered safe. This can save you years of testing, because if there is an outbreak time is usually short."***

The biochemist, who is also the Director of the Institute for Biochemistry at the University of Lübeck, went on to reiterate, "And lopinavir and ritonavir are [already] approved — just against HIV."

Asked how the medications work, Hilgenfeld explained that viruses, which use long chains of RNA, rather than DNA, as the basis of their genetic code, can be prevented from replicating through the use of enzymes. He added that his team's research into treatments for SARS didn't get as far as the development as a new drug because new drugs takes years to develop, and the SARS outbreak was over in a matter of a few months. He noted that "it's not that difficult to develop" such a drug, but lamented a lack of "research support."

Hilgenfeld recalled how, before the 2002 outbreak, research into the coronavirus was seen as "unimportant" because it was not known at that time that the virus could cause anything worse than a cold.

But the existing arsenal of drugs targeting viruses contains yet a third medicine in addition to the HIV drugs that seem promising in the fight against the new outbreak.

Hilgenfeld identified that drug as "Remdesivir," which, he said, "was originally developed against the Ebola virus." But, he cautioned, "unlike the combination of lopinavir and ritonavir, [remdesivir] has never been used in humans against coronaviruses."

"In this respect, it can be called experimental," Hilgenfeld added, "but it has already been tested for safety in humans."

Kilian Melloy serves as EDGE Media Network's Assistant Arts Editor. He also reviews theater for WBUR. His professional memberships include the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association, the Boston Online Film Critics Association, The Gay and Lesbian Entertainment Critics Association, and the Boston Theater Critics Association's Elliot Norton Awards Committee.

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