No link between Covid-19 risk and hypertension drugs

But those with hypertension should take more care – among the 23 Covid-19 deaths so far, 10 patients aged between 60 and 86 were said to have a history of the condition.

In chairman, Professor Tan Huay Cheem, said about 26 per cent of Covid-19 patients in Singapore had pre-existing hypertension.

Across the entire island, 10 patients aged between 60 and 86 were reported to have a history of hypertension.

While Mr Lee is aware of this, he does not worry as he takes personal hygiene seriously.

“I wash my hands with soap frequently and wear a mask outdoors. I trust that I have followed the best guidelines,” said the manager of a beverage company, although he conceded that there is still a possibility of getting infected.

Given the prevalence of hypertension, it is not surprising that the disease is common among patients with Covid-19, said Prof Tan, who is also director of the National University Heart Centre.

He said it is important for those with hypertension to maintain normal blood pressure during the disease.

Hypertension can result in complications such as coronary artery disease, heart failure, chronic kidney failure, abnormal heart rhythms and stroke, which can worsen the general health and immunity of Covid-19 patients, especially the elderly, he said.

The presence of such complications increases the disease and death risk of Covid-19 patients who also suffer from hypertension, said Prof Tan.

Blood pressure is also a vital parameter in managing the health of Covid-19 patients, particularly in the intensive care unit, he said.

“Factors in blood pressure are a physiological response to any form of activity or stress. Physical exercise such as aerobic or resistance exercise, as well as anxiety, will cause the pressure rise,” Dr Tan said.

Prof Tan said that patients with certain blood pressure-lowering medicines may increase an enzyme, which is needed for the Sars-CoV-2 (the strain of coronavirus that causes Covid-19) to enter the cells to cause the disease. The finding also links to the hypothesis that those receiving these medicines were more susceptible to Covid-19.

This led to the rapid widespread dissemination of the risks of those with Covid-19 and hypertension, said Dr Tan.

However, a study by researchers from the New York University Grossman School of Medicine in New York and collaborating institutions has shown the risk of those receiving these medicines were more susceptible to Covid-19.

REASSURING CONCLUSION

Earlier studies in China suggest that a class of hypertension medicines known as angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors and angiotensin receptor blockers increased the susceptibility of patients to Covid-19.

These medicines are commonly used to control hypertension, improve heart function in those with heart failure and prevent progression of kidney failure.

Dr Tan said: “Those studies suggest that patients with certain blood-pressure-lowering medicines may initially cause an enzyme, which is needed for the Sars-CoV-2 (the strain of coronavirus that causes Covid-19) to enter the cells to cause the disease. The finding also links to the hypothesis that those receiving these medicines were more susceptible to Covid-19.”

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Blood clots and Covid-19

Medical experts in March first flagged that Covid-19 increases the likelihood of blood clots in patients. The formation of these blood clots can be dangerous as they can travel to the brain or heart, causing a stroke or heart attack.

Neurologists at University College London studied six Covid-19 patients who had acute stroke as a result of a large arterial blockage. In five of the cases, the stroke occurred more than a week after the patients showed Covid-19 symptoms such as headache, cough and fever. One patient was pre-symptomatic when the stroke happened.

The researchers found all six patients had markedly raised blood levels of a protein fragment called D-dimer, which is associated with abnormal clotting.

The findings suggested that early testing for D-dimer could enable doctors to prescribe blood-thinning drugs to people at risk, reducing the chance of stroke or harmful clotting elsewhere in the body.

Professor Tan Huay Cheem, chairman of the Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF), said coronaviruses are well known to increase blood coagulability. This means blood clots tend to form more easily within the circulatory system, with serious complications.

A blood clot can form in an artery or vein in any part of the body. It can travel to other parts of the body. If it lodges in the heart or brain, blocking blood flow to these organs, it can result in a heart attack or stroke.

In deep vein thrombosis, a clot forms in a vein deep in the body, often in the leg. If the clot travels to the lung, it could cause a pulmonary embolism – blocking of a major blood vessel – and gangrenous toes, said Prof Tan, said. “It is important to monitor Covid-19 patients for such potential complications. Blood thinning medicines may be selectively used in high risk patients to prevent such clot formation.”

Dr Mak Koon Hou, SHF assistant honorary secretary, said patients with severe illness, particularly those who are immobilised, are more likely to have an increased risk of clot formation.

“The risk is higher for those with more risk factors such as diabetes and heart disease. What is surprising is the extent of the problem and degree of clot formation, particularly for those who are not apparently at high risk of clot formation.”

“Recognising this adverse manifestation of Covid-19 can lead to an earlier institution of clot prevention,” added Dr Mak.