

# World Health Body Endorses Use of Experimental Drugs Against Ebola Virus

GENEVA — The World Health Organization on Tuesday endorsed the use of untested drugs to combat the Ebola virus, just hours after a Spanish priest who had been supplied with experimental medication became the first European to die of a disease that has claimed more than 1,000 lives in West Africa and which ranks as the worst known outbreak.

Citing medical confidentiality rules, hospital officials in Madrid declined to say whether the priest, Miguel Pajares, 75, had been treated with an [experimental drug, ZMapp](#), made in the United States, which the Spanish Health Ministry said on Monday it had obtained for him.

In Geneva, the World Health Organization convened an ethics panel on Monday to debate the broader use of untested drugs and said [in a statement](#) on its website on Tuesday: “In the particular circumstances of this outbreak, and provided certain conditions are met, the panel reached consensus that it is ethical to offer unproven interventions with as yet unknown efficacy and adverse effects, as potential treatment or prevention.”

## Graphic What You Need to Know About the Ebola Outbreak

Questions and answers on the scale of the outbreak and the science of the Ebola virus.

The panel said the use of untested drugs should be guided by ethical criteria, including transparency about all aspects of the care provided, informed consent of the patient, freedom of choice and patient confidentiality.

No proven cure or vaccine exists for the Ebola virus, which the World Health Organization reported has now killed 1,013 people in four West African countries — Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria. Around half the people infected in the outbreak, which was first reported in March, have died.

Last week the World Health Organization [declared the outbreak](#) a global health emergency.

So far, experimental medication has been made available to only a handful of patients, all of them foreign aid workers evacuated from West Africa, prompting ethical concerns about disparities in the availability of treatment between white outsiders and the Africans who form the overwhelming majority of the victims.



OPEN Graphic

ZMapp, the drug sent to Madrid for Mr. Pajares, was reported last week to have helped two American aid workers, Dr. Kent Brantly and Nancy Writebol, who were initially treated in Liberia and were evacuated to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta.

The Spanish priest, Mr. Pajares, was flown back to Spain with a nun who worked with him, Juliana Bohi, who has tested negative for the Ebola virus. He was treated at Carlos III hospital in Madrid. The priest worked for a Roman Catholic order based in Spain that runs hospitals in many parts of the world and had been treating Ebola patients in Liberia. His death from the Ebola virus was the first reported on European soil.

Tuesday’s statement from the World Health Organization came as Liberia announced that it would receive ZMapp after a request to the United States by its president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

The World Health Organization played no part in that decision, a spokeswoman, Fadela Chaib, told reporters in Geneva.

Mapp Biopharmaceutical, the San Diego company that developed ZMapp, said in a statement that it had complied with a request received over the weekend from a West African nation that it did not identify but which was apparently Liberia. It said that in doing so, the available supply of ZMapp was now “exhausted.”

The company said that it had complied with every request for ZMapp that had the necessary legal and regulatory approvals. This apparently means that the government involved had to approve use of the drug and that the patient involved had given informed consent to use the experimental treatment.

One person briefed on the provision of the treatment, who requested anonymity because of the legal and political sensitivity of the matter, said that enough of the drug to treat three people was being sent to Liberia.



