

FDA says Vertex hepatitis drug is highly effective

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(AP) -- Federal health officials say a highly anticipated hepatitis C drug from Vertex Pharmaceuticals successfully treats a clear majority of patients in less time than older medicines that have been used for 20 years.

The [Food and Drug Administration](#) posted its review of Vertex's telaprevir ahead of a meeting Thursday where outside experts will vote on the benefits of the drug. On Wednesday the experts will review a similar drug from Merck.

Both new drugs work by blocking the enzyme protease, which allows the hepatitis virus to reproduce. The new approach represents a breakthrough from older medicines, which are designed to help the [immune system](#) fight hepatitis.

FDA scientists said 79 percent of patients who added telaprevir to older medicines were virus free six months after treatment.

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