

News AIDS drug's cost is triple other treatments

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NEW YORK— A new, breakthrough AIDS medicine will cost nearly \$20,000 a year in the U.S., almost triple the cost of the most expensive treatment now available.

Fuzeon, developed by Roche and Trimeris Inc. for patients who are resistant to existing AIDS medicines, will cost \$19,990 a year, the companies said.

The drug has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Activists have complained that Fuzeon's price is too high and will keep the drug from those who really need it.

Medicaid pays for about 50 percent of all AIDS drugs, but is under intense pressure as states struggle with budget deficits. Government-funded AIDS Drug Assistance Programs, known as ADAPS, cover about 30 percent of drugs, but budget problems have already forced 16 of the 56 ADAPS to cut back on services.

The average AIDS patient takes a combination of drugs that costs around \$14,000. Because Fuzeon must be combined with some existing drugs, its total cost per year could approach \$30,000. □