

Johnson & Johnson plans Ebola vaccine testing

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In this Oct. 10, 2008, file photo, Johnson & Johnson products are shown in Philadelphia. Johnson & Johnson says it will start safety testing in early January on a potential vaccine combination that could protect against a strain of the deadly Ebola virus. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)

Johnson & Johnson will begin safety testing in early January on a vaccine combination that could protect people from a strain of the deadly Ebola virus.

The [health care](#) products maker said Wednesday that the [vaccine](#) being developed by its Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies protects against an Ebola strain that is "highly similar" to the virus that has triggered the current outbreak in West Africa. Johnson & Johnson also plans to test whether its vaccine protects against the version causing the outbreak, which has killed more than 4,500 people.

The New Brunswick, New Jersey, company has committed up to \$200 million to speed up and expand production of the vaccine program.

Johnson & Johnson is developing the vaccine with the Danish biotech company Bavarian Nordic. It

involves a regimen in which two vaccines are delivered two months apart. The combination provided complete protection in animals.

There are no proven drugs or vaccines for Ebola, a disease so rare that it's been hard to attract investments in countermeasures. The current outbreak has struck mostly in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone since it emerged 10 months ago.

Several drugmakers are racing to conduct clinical trials of potential vaccines on humans. The World Health Organization is helping coordinate trials of two other experimental vaccines. It hopes to start testing as early as January on more than 20,000 front-line [health](#) care workers and others in West Africa.

That testing will go forward only if the vaccines prove safe and trigger an adequate immune-system response in volunteers during clinical trials that are either underway or planned in Europe, Africa and the United States.

One of those vaccines is being developed by the U.S. National Institutes of Health and British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline from a modified chimpanzee cold virus and an Ebola protein. It is in [clinical trials](#) now in Britain and in Mali. The other was developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada and sent to the U.S. Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Maryland for testing on healthy volunteers.

Shares of Johnson & Johnson climbed \$1.34 to \$101.70 Wednesday before markets opened and after the company announced the vaccine update.

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