

Indian firm says developing 'world's first Zika vaccine'

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An Indian drugmaker on Wednesday said it was developing the world's first vaccine against Zika after the World Health Organization declared an global emergency over the rapidly spreading virus.

Bharat Biotech, a [vaccine manufacturer](#) based in the southern city of Hyderabad, said two vaccines had been in development for a year and were ready for pre-clinical testing in animals.

There is currently no proven [vaccine](#) for the mosquito-borne Zika [virus](#), which has spread throughout Latin America where it has been blamed for a surge in brain-damaged babies.

"We are the first in the world to file for a global patent for a Zika virus vaccine," Rajarshi Dasgupta, head of company's legal and intellectual property department, told AFP, adding that the company filed for the patent a year ago.

The World Health Organization has declared an international health emergency over Zika, saying it was "strongly suspected" to be linked to a large number of babies born with microcephaly, or abnormally small heads.

Soumya Swaminathan, director general of the Indian Council for Medical Research, said it had asked Bharat Biotech to provide scientific details of the vaccine.

"We have contacted the company and have asked them to present a detailed presentation to see if we can lend help in taking it forward," Swaminathan told AFP.

A senior scientist at the Indian firm, who requested anonymity, said it was expediting the research process in the wake of global outbreak but gave no timeframe for trials or any possible commercial launch.

Bharat's announcement comes a day after French

company Sanofi Pasteur said it had launched a [vaccine research](#) and development project to combat the Zika virus.

While no Zika cases have been reported in India, one has been reported in Thailand and another in Indonesia, and US health authorities have said a patient in Texas contracted the virus through sexual transmission.

The Aedes aegypti mosquito, which carries Zika and the dengue and chikungunya viruses, is also widely prevalent in India, which reports thousands of cases of dengue annually.

Zika was first detected in a Ugandan forest of the same name in 1947, but it was considered a relatively mild disease until the current outbreak was declared in Latin America last year.

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