

Britain's GSK joins race to develop China virus vaccine

February 3 2020



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UK pharmaceuticals giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) said Monday it was joining a global race to develop a vaccine for a new strain of a coronavirus that has killed more than 360 people.

The UK government also pledged £20 million (\$26 million, 24 million euros) in funding for research at the Coalition for Epidemic

Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)—a group formed at the in Davos in 2017—and released its sequencing data for the viral genome.

GSK said its work will complement the four projects already being funded through CEPI to develop a vaccine for the deadly China strain.

"Our (vaccine) adjuvant technology has previously been used successfully in the pandemic flu setting," GSK Vaccine chief medical officer Thomas Breuer said in a statement.

Adjuvants are agents that boost a body's response to vaccines or other treatments.

The World Health Organization has declared a global virus emergency but refrained from calling the new epidemic a "pandemic".

That term is reserved for a disease that spreads across multiple continents or worldwide.

CEPI was originally formed in response to the Ebola epidemic that killed more than 11,300 people of the 29,000 recorded cases in West Africa from 2013 to 2016.

"Our hope is that, with our partners, we can get an investigational vaccine from gene sequencing of the pathogen through to clinical testing in 16 weeks," CEPI chief executive Richard Hatchett said.

CEPI's four other projects aimed at stamping out the new strain include a partnership between the US biotech company Moderna and the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

GSK said it will initially be joining the work already being performed by the University of Queensland in Australia.

The other two projects involve the German biopharmaceutical company CureVac and the US-based Inovio pharmaceuticals firm.

UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Public Health England has been able to sequence the genome from the two cases of new viral strain recorded in Britain.

"Their findings suggest the virus has not evolved in the last month," Hancock told parliament.

China shared its genome sequencing data on January 10.

Hancock said health ministers from Group of Seven (G7) nations spoke by telephone Monday to coordinate their response.

"It is clear that the virus will be with us at least some months to come," the British health minister said.

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Citation: Britain's GSK joins race to develop China virus vaccine (2020, February 3) retrieved 28 January 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-02-britain-gsk-china-virus-vaccine.html>

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