EU expands vaccine options with CureVac contract

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The EU is to sign a contract with German pharmaceutical company CureVac for another potential COVID-19 vaccine, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Monday.

The deal, to be signed Tuesday, brings to five the number of vaccines the EU will have in its portfolio, with a sixth, from US firm Moderna, on its way, von der Leyen said in a video statement.

The portfolio already includes a contract for 300 million doses of a vaccine produced by German company BioNTech and US giant Pfizer which both manufacturers say has proven 90 percent effective against COVID-19.

"The coronavirus continues to spread rapidly across Europe. We need a safe and effective vaccine to end this pandemic", von der Leyen said.

The CureVac contract is an option to buy up to 405 million doses if its vaccine is proven to be safe and effective.

Von der Leyen did not disclose the financial terms, in line with the same confidentiality given the other companies making candidate vaccines.

The EU chief said the European Medicines Agency would assess the potential vaccines and only authorise them if they passed health standards.

"This is why we need to have a broad portfolio of vaccines based on very different technologies," von der Leyen said.

The European Union's population is 450 million. It is unknown at this stage how long the effects of a viable vaccine might last or if one, two or more jabs could be needed to create human resistance to the coronavirus.

No vaccine has yet been shown to be effective for large-scale production, but there are hopes at least one might be rushed to market by early next year.

Clinical results from the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine are still being evaluated.

Both Russia and China declare they have each produced working vaccines, but have not given complete clinical information so that Western regulatory agencies might weigh them for public use.

Aware of criticism that wealthy countries were snapping up millions of doses of possible vaccines, von der Leyen stressed that the EU was working with a World Health Organization-backed initiative called COVAX to get successful COVID-19 jabs to poorer nations.

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