

Japan to start developing swine flu vaccine

May 4 2009, The Yomiuri Shimbun

The Japanese Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry announced Saturday the start of vaccine development against swine flu, following the arrival of a sample of the new type of flu strain at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States.

It is expected to take about six months before the [vaccine](#) will be on the market, officials said.

The NIID will first create a "seed" from the [virus strain](#) that is suitable for vaccine development. The seed is a virus modified to easily multiply in a chicken egg.

The modified virus will be distributed to four vaccine makers and institutions in the country so they can start manufacturing the vaccine against the new type of flu.

However, the vaccine makers already are producing vaccines on some of their manufacturing lines for the annual seasonal influenzas, which become rampant every winter.

Therefore, it will be necessary to adjust the manufacturing process before the facilities can start producing the new vaccine.

The government will decide the quantity of the new vaccine to be produced after closely monitoring the new virus to determine its virulence, according to a health ministry official.

The newly obtained virus strain is also expected to help [public health](#) officials speed the process of determining whether a patient has contracted the virus, the officials said.

Currently, confirmation of infections suspected of being the new type of flu takes place at three levels -- first at local hospitals, then local public health institutes and eventually the NIID.

Though the NIID developed a test kit to detect the infection at the local public health institute level, it turned out having a strain of the new virus itself was necessary for a detailed confirmation.

The virus strain will make it possible for local public health institutes to confirm the infection of the new type of flu, according to the officials.

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Citation: Japan to start developing swine flu vaccine (2009, May 4) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-05-japan-swine-flu-vaccine.html>

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