

# Texas A&M awarded US biodefense contract

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(AP) — The Texas A&M University System will be the home of one of three national biodefense centers to help the U.S. quickly develop vaccines in the event of a pandemic and strategies for responding to bioterrorism.

Texas A&M's Center for Innovation in Advanced Development and Manufacturing was one of three centers announced Monday by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Texas A&M System Chancellor John Sharp.

A second center will be led by Emergent Manufacturing Operations Baltimore LLC in Maryland in partnership with Michigan State University, Kettering University in Michigan and the University of Maryland-Baltimore. A third center will be based in North Carolina, and led by Novartis, in partnership with North Carolina State University in Raleigh and Duke University in Durham.

The biodefense centers will work to develop and manufacture vaccines to rapidly respond and protect against influenza pandemics and conduct research and training for responding to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.

"The threats we face today as a nation are constantly evolving," Sebelius said, calling the centers a "dramatic step forward in ensuring that the United States can produce life-saving countermeasures quickly and nimbly.

"They will improve our ability to protect Americans' health in an emergency," Sebelius said.

The federal government will spent about \$400 million on the initial contracts. Texas A&M will get about \$176 million in federal money with another \$109 million from its commercial and academic partners. The state of Texas already has committed about \$ 40 million to the project.

Texas A&M will partner with pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline's facility in Pennsylvania, Kalon Biotherapeutics in College Station and more than 20 other public and private researchers across the country.

University system officials project a long-term investment in the billions and laud it as the biggest federal program to be awarded to the state of Texas since NASA.

"It's a game-changer for us, and, we think, for Texas," Sharp said. "This is just another war: A war against natural pandemics and not-so-natural terrorism."

In 2010, President Barack Obama said he wanted the U.S. to develop a new plan for a better and quicker response to bioterrorism threats and attacks. The move came after the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation gave the government a failing grade for its efforts to prepare for and respond to a biological attack.

Sharp said Texas A&M was well-positioned to bid for the project, given its historical connection to the military and its ongoing research in the fields of engineering, life sciences and veterinary medicine.

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