

Ebola vaccine trials being fast-tracked: researchers (Update)

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Safety trials on an Ebola vaccine are being fast-tracked, meaning it could be given to healthy volunteers as early as September, researchers said Thursday.

The vaccine will be given to volunteers in Britain, the Gambia and Mali in a bid to tackle the spread of an epidemic which has spread across west Africa, killing 1,552 so far.

Researchers hope the trials could finish by the end of 2014.

If they are successful, the vaccine could then be given to people infected with Ebola, which is spread through bodily fluids.

The move was announced by pharmaceuticals giant GlaxoSmithKline—which is developing the vaccine with the US National Institutes of Health (NIH)—and London-based medical charity Wellcome Trust, which is contributing to a grant to pay for the trials.

"A candidate Ebola vaccine could be given to healthy volunteers in the UK, the Gambia and Mali as early as September, as part of a series of safety trials of potential vaccines," the statement said.

A total of 3,062 cases have so far been reported but the World Health Organization warned Thursday that the caseload could eventually exceed 20,000.

The trials, which still need ethical and regulatory approval, will be funded by a £2.8 million (3.5 million euro, \$4.6 million) grant from the Wellcome Trust, Britain's Medical Research Council (MRC) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The Oxford study will involve 60 healthy volunteers, while those in the Gambia and Mali will each involve 40.

This will also allow GSK to make some 10,000 extra doses of the vaccine so that if the trials are successful, it could be made available to the WHO quickly.

Safety tests of the vaccine will take place at Oxford University alongside a US trial run by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

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