

Two leading Ebola vaccines appear safe, further tests starting (Update)

January 9 2015, by Maria Cheng

The World Health Organization says the two leading Ebola vaccines appear safe and will soon be tested in healthy volunteers in West Africa.

After an expert meeting this week, WHO said there is now enough information to conclude that the two most advanced Ebola vaccines—one made by GlaxoSmithKline and the other licensed by Merck and NewLink—have "an acceptable safety profile."

In a press briefing on Friday, Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, who heads WHO's Ebola vaccine efforts, said "the cupboard (for Ebola vaccines) is filling up rapidly."

She said further trials in healthy people in West Africa, including health workers, are scheduled to start soon. Kieny added several other vaccines were being developed in the U.S., Russia and elsewhere.

Despite the temporary suspension of a trial of the vaccine made by NewLink and Merck in December, Kieny said there was no sign of significant side effects. That trial was put on hold while experts investigated reports of joint pain in a number of participants. It was an unexpected side effect but Kieny said it was not worrying enough to stop the vaccine's development. No such side effects have been reported with the other vaccine.

The next phase of trials will likely take about six months and manufacturers will ramp up their production at the same time, meaning

millions of doses could be available later this year. It's unclear if that will be quick enough to help slow the epidemic, which appears to be on the decline. So far, Ebola is believed to have sickened more than 20,000 people and killed about 8,000, mostly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Officials estimate the death rate to be about 71 percent.

"We will have to take stock when we have the vaccines," said Helen Rees of the University of Witwatersrand, who chaired the WHO meeting. She said experts would have to consider at that point whether it's useful to vaccinate entire populations or focus only on high-risk groups.

Dr. Peter Piot, the co-discoverer of the Ebola virus, said he was concerned there might be too few cases to prove the vaccines worked. Still, he said every option should be pursued to stop the world's biggest-ever outbreak of Ebola.

"With Ebola, you need to find every last case and stop all transmission," he said. "It may be that we won't be able to do that without a vaccine," Piot said.

GAVI, a private-public vaccine alliance, has pledged to spend \$300 million on WHO-recommended Ebola vaccines, which it estimates could translate into 12 million doses.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Two leading Ebola vaccines appear safe, further tests starting (Update) (2015, January 9) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-01-ebola-vaccines-safe.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.