

Pfizer is expanding its vaccine portfolio, developing others

July 21 2015, byThe Associated Press



This May 4, 2014 file photo shows the logo on the exterior of a former Pfizer factory in the Brooklyn borough of New York. Pfizer has expanded its research on vaccines to eventually safeguard people from cradle to grave, from shots for pregnant women to protect their babies from the moment of birth to vaccines for senior citizens with waning immune systems, company officials said Tuesday, July 21, 2015. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

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people from cradle to grave, from shots for pregnant women to protect their babies from the moment of birth to vaccines for senior citizens with waning immune systems, company officials said Tuesday during a media briefing.

The biggest U.S. drugmaker sells the world's top-selling vaccine, Prevnar 13 against pneumonia and other infections. The shot had sales of nearly \$4.5 billion last year.

New York-based Pfizer Inc. has long talked of building its portfolio in vaccines, one of its core research areas, but until last year Pfizer had no others.

Now it has four approved in the U.S. and other countries. It's testing others against deadly bacteria spread in hospitals and the community, a virus that's common in young adults, and against cancer and severe high cholesterol in older patients.

"It's a very exciting time ... in vaccines," as they're being broadened far beyond use mainly in children, said Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer's global research director.

Last October, Pfizer got the first U.S. approval for a vaccine that protects against the group B strain of bacterial meningitis, which caused unrelated outbreaks of meningococcal disease last year at Princeton University and the University of California-Santa Barbara. Pfizer's Trumenba was approved for people aged 10 to 25.

The tough-to-treat bacteria, called *Neisseria meningitidis*, is spread through saliva and respiratory fluids via coughing, kissing and sharing utensils. It can infect the lining surrounding the brain and spinal cord, causing meningitis, or infect the bloodstream and cause sepsis.

In December, Pfizer bought two vaccines from Baxter International Inc.—one called FSME-IMMUN against tick-borne encephalitis, a viral brain infection becoming more common in Europe and Asia, and one called NeisVac-C against the common group C strain of meningitis. That's a bacterial brain infection, easily spread through respiratory and throat secretions, that either kills or causes permanent brain or physical damage in up to half those infected. Pfizer also bought part of the factory in Orth, Austria, where they're made as part of that \$635 million deal.

Last month, Pfizer announced a \$130 million deal to acquire two complementary vaccines from GlaxoSmithKline Plc against four other strains of meningitis: A, C, W and Y.

Next up, the company will apply in 2016 for European Union approval of Trumenba.

Meanwhile, Pfizer researchers are conducting a midstage study of a vaccine against *Staphylococcus aureus*, which kills more than 10,000 people a year in the U.S. alone. Normally, another round of testing with many more patients would be required for approval, but Pfizer hope these study results will be strong enough to gain approval.

Other Pfizer targets include the deadly bacteria *Clostridium difficile* and group B *Streptococcus*, a virus called cytomegalovirus or CMV that strikes children, and multiple approaches to stimulating the immune system to better fight off cancer.

Company officials said Pfizer is in very early research on vaccines for pregnant women that could pass on crucial antibodies to would protect their newborns, and it's developing a version of Prevnar for poor countries that can remain potent if it's not refrigerated for up to three days. That's a big issue in places where transportation is slow and

refrigeration is limited.

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Citation: Pfizer is expanding its vaccine portfolio, developing others (2015, July 21) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-07-pfizer-vaccine-portfolio.html>

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