

Companies look into possible vaccines for China virus

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Clinical trials for a vaccine against the new virus sweeping China could be carried out in the summer, the head of an anti-epidemic coalition said on Thursday, as different companies announced research into the disease.

"We can announce that we have three partnerships to develop vaccines against the novel coronavirus," Richard Hatchett, chief executive of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), said in Davos.

"Our goal is to have these vaccines developed very rapidly and to move very rapidly to begin clinical trials, perhaps as early as the summer," Hatchett said during the annual World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort town.

A fourth company, Novavax, which has worked on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), said earlier it had also initiated development of a vaccine candidate.

There is no vaccine or antiviral treatment against the novel coronavirus detected in China, which has killed 18 people so far and has now spread internationally.

Hatchett said the three partnerships were with Inovio Pharmaceuticals, a US-based company, the University of Queensland in Australia and Moderna, another US biotech firm.

Moderna is working with the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a US government agency.

Shares in Inovio jumped 6.68 percent on the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday, while Moderna stock was up 1.37 percent and by a total of 6.5 percent over two sessions.

Shares in other biotech companies also rose in expectation of growing interest in a vaccine against the virus.

Stock in Novavax jumped 11.42 percent after their announcements, while NanoViricides, which is conducting research into Ebola, rose

36.91 percent.

Hatchett said that even if the virus had disappeared by the time a vaccine is developed, having one would still be "very advantageous".

"If the virus doesn't disappear and it spreads globally, we will be glad that we made these investments today," he added.

Stephane Bancel, chief executive of Moderna, told AFP that his company planned to develop the vaccine at its plant in Boston with financing from CEPI.

Bancel also said he planned clinical trials by the summer, adding "normally to develop traditional vaccines the same process would take two or three years".

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