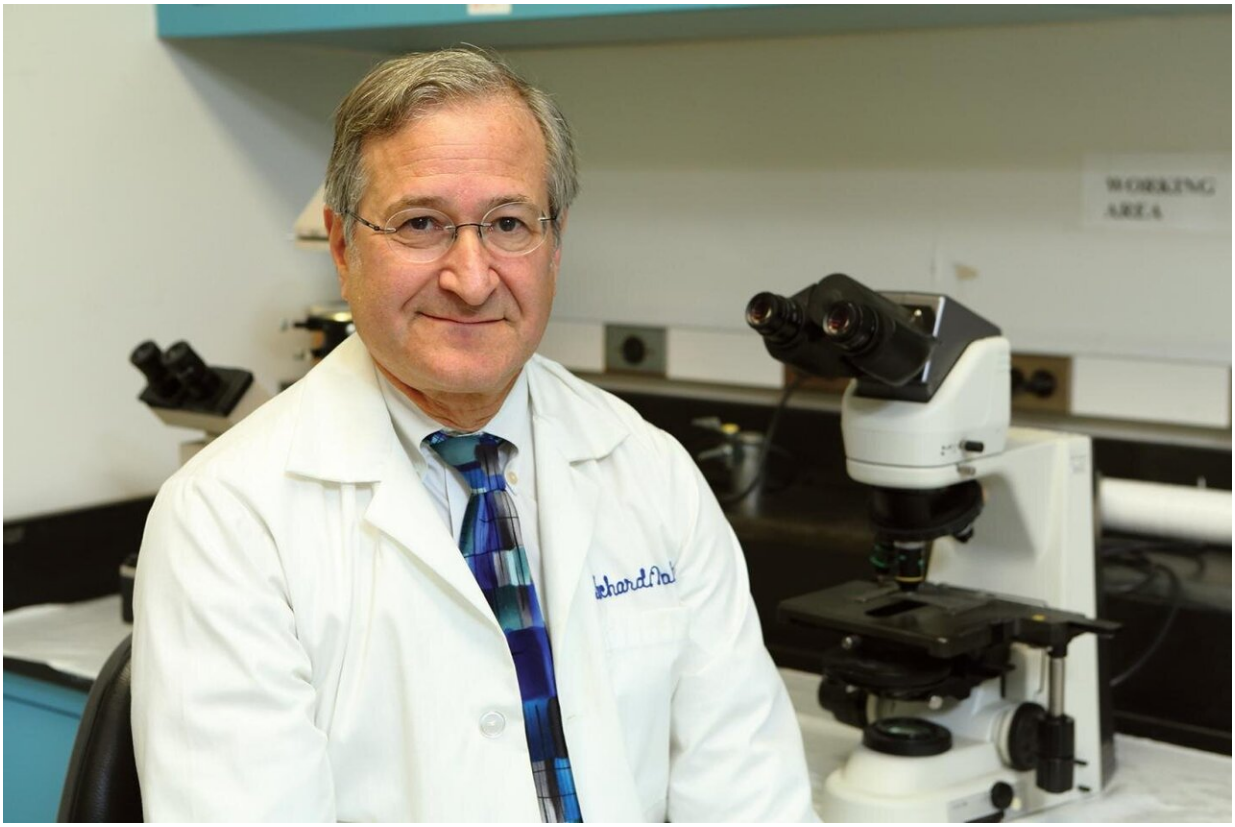
COVID-19 vaccine to be tested in clinical trial

June 15 2020



UIC's Dr. Richard novak Credit: UIC/Jenny Fontaine

The University of Illinois at Chicago will soon test a vaccine for COVID-19.

Expected to launch July 9, the trial—a phase 3 clinical study—will test the efficacy of a vaccine developed by biotech company Moderna.

"We want to see if the vaccine will prevent people from getting COVID-19 or if it will prevent people from experiencing severe illness if they do get the disease," said Dr. Richard Novak, lead investigator of the clinical trial at UIC.

UIC is expected to be the only site in Chicago selected to launch the Moderna phase 3 trial, which is being administered by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease.

"UIC has a history of engaging diverse communities in our research programs and I believe our ability to reach the communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic is one of the reasons that we were selected for this clinical trial," Novak said.

The Moderna vaccine candidate is an RNA-based vaccine designed to help the body produce antibodies that protect against COVID-19.

Novak, who is a UIC professor and head of infectious diseases at the College of Medicine, has researched and led numerous vaccine trials for infectious diseases throughout his career.

"RNA vaccines represent a new class of vaccines that researchers hope will be more effective than other types," Novak said. "The application of this type of innovation to COVID-19 is exciting, although the need for a vaccine of any type against COVID-19 is a pressing and urgent public health necessity."

According to Novak, the clinical trial network hopes to enroll up to 30,000 individuals into the trial. About 1,000 individuals initially will be enrolled through UIC's trial. Novak said investigators will screen

volunteers for the trial to ensure that 40% or more of participants are 65 years and older.

"We want to test this vaccine in people who are most at risk of experiencing complications and death due to the virus," Novak said.

Participants will be assigned randomly to one of two groups: a study group, which will receive the vaccine, and a control group, which will receive a placebo. Neither the researchers nor the participants will know who gets the vaccine.

"This type of randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial is the best way to determine if the vaccine works. We hope that participants who receive the vaccine will have better protection against COVID-19," Novak said.

To test the vaccine's efficacy, researchers will collect basic demographic and health information and blood samples from participants in the clinical trial and will follow the participants for two years—they will check in weekly to monitor for symptoms, will conduct COVID-19 testing if symptoms develop and will take additional blood samples to test for antibodies.

The UIC vaccine trial will be accessible through a number of clinical locations in the University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, or UI Health, including sites in Pilsen, Little Village and Hyde Park.

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago