

# Cash deal for Africa's innovative mRNA vaccine

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The UN-backed global Medicines Patent Pool on Thursday signed a 39-million-euro (\$45 million) grant with South African biotech firm Afrigen to fund work on new mRNA COVID jabs.

Cape Town-based Afrigen Biologics and Vaccines is leading a [pilot project](#), backed by the World Health Organization and the COVAX initiative, to tweak Moderna's shot.

The goal is to make an mRNA [vaccine](#) that can be kept at warmer temperatures, making them easier to store in low- and middle-income settings. The original jab requires expensive  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  refrigeration.

The project's first batches of mRNA vaccines have already been produced, according to a statement.

Charles Gore, MPP's [executive director](#) said in a statement that his organisation was "delighted to support Afrigen and its African partners to greatly expand local manufacturing capacity and reduce today's gross inequity".

The grant will cover the technology transfer hub's work for five years, through 2026.

The French government funds the MPP's activities linked to the hub.

"We will keep supporting this project... it's a very important one for the world and for Africa," the French ambassador to Pretoria, Aurelien Lechevallier said after touring the lab.

The MPP is an international organisation that supports development of medicines for low- and [middle-income countries](#).

Set up in July, the tech transfer hub will train other countries and hand out production licences to poor nations left out in the race for the life-saving shots.

"Its aim is to allow for greater and more diversified vaccine manufacturing capability, strengthen African regional health security and respond more equitably" to the current and future pandemics, said a statement.

Africa is the least vaccinated continent in the world.

More than a year after the world's first COVID shot was administered and two years into the pandemic itself, just 11.3 percent of Africans have been fully immunised.

The problem has exposed Africa's huge dependence on imported vaccines and its tech weakness compared with Europe, China, and the United States.

To date only one percent of the vaccines used in Africa are produced on the continent.

Other players involved in the Cape Town hub which was set up in July are Biologicals and Vaccines Institute of Southern Africa (Biovac), the South African Medical Research Council, and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

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