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New testing of Ebola vaccine to start next month in Canada

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An Ebola vaccine developed by Canadian researchers and considered by the WHO to be the first effective treatment against the virus will soon start a new phase of clinical trials, Ottawa announced Tuesday.

The vaccine's safety and effectiveness will be tested on volunteers infected with HIV, starting in Ottawa and Montreal in November, and followed by trials in Senegal and Burkina Faso next year, the government said in a statement.

The tests are being conducted in partnership with US pharmaceutical company Merck.

"It is particularly important to study the effectiveness of this Ebola vaccine in vulnerable populations, such as those living with HIV," said principal investigator Cecile Tremblay.

"These populations can often be most at-risk during outbreaks, because of their compromised immune systems."

Ebola is spread by contact with bodily fluids, and causes a range of symptoms, from fever and body aches to vomiting, diarrhea and hemorrhage.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Ebola has killed up to 90 percent of those infected during some outbreaks, though the average chance of survival is about 50 percent. A 2014 epidemic killed

more than 11,000 people in West Africa.

The Ebola vaccine, originally developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada, provided blanket protection in a field trial in Guinea, according to a preliminary study published in 2015.

The results published in The Lancet medical journal were hailed as "extremely promising" by the World Health Organization.

The world was "on the verge of an effective Ebola vaccine," the UN's health agency had said in a statement.

The final results of the study are expected to be published this fall, said the Canadian government.

"This next phase of clinical trials is an important milestone in the development of the world's first proven, effective vaccine against the Ebola virus," commented Health Minister Jane Philpott.

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