

China and Russia share tech, data for vaccine trials amid hopes of mass production

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Vaccine Photo:VCG

Volunteers participating in a joint China-Russia COVID-19 vaccine trial are scheduled to have all been vaccinated by the end of September and the results will be released by late autumn, Petrovax, a leading Russian pharmaceutical products developer, told the Global Times on Sunday.

The vaccine candidate undergoing trial is a recombinant adenovirus vaccine named Ad5-nCoV, which was co-developed by Chinese biopharmaceutical firm CanSino Biologics Inc. and a team led by Chinese military infectious disease expert Chen Wei. The vaccine is under the Phase II clinical trials in Russia which Petrovax participated in.

About a month after the volunteers have been vaccinated, "we will begin to process and evaluate the results on safety and immunogenicity," Petrovax told the Global Times in an email.

"We see a great potential in Ad5-nCoV vaccine, and Petrovax has tools and knowledge on running large clinical trials," said the company.

"We believe the global community can overcome the pandemic faster and find an effective tool to combat COVID-19 only through international cooperation."

The volunteers will be monitored for six months after they are vaccinated, Petrovax said.

"Thanks to this partnership, Petrovax and Russian researchers are among the first in the world to gain direct international clinical experience in the use of a modern vaccine against COVID-19 and bring opportunities for its early registration in Russia."

The trial was hailed by members of the Chinese public who expressed hope for good results. China's top respiratory scientist Zhong Nanshan revealed the China-Russia cooperation on August 16 at an academic exchange conference on the coronavirus in South China's Guangdong Province.

The two countries have shared opinions and information regarding pandemic control, and extended the partnership into joint clinical studies promising vaccines against the disease, representatives said at the conference sponsored by the Association of Sino-Russian Medical Universities (ASRMU).

Experts said the move is part of China's promise to pitch in to fight the global spread of the virus. China and Russia have a sound basis for vaccine cooperation in resource sharing and mass production, they said.

The two countries can exchange data and techniques around vaccine R&D given that the second dose of Russia's newly approved, COVID-19 vaccine, the world's first, has almost the same mechanism with the China-developed adenovirus vector COVID-19 vaccine Ad5-nCoV, according to Tao Lina, a Shanghai-based immunological expert.

China may also be able to help Russia with mass production for its second dose of the vaccine if needed, considering China has relatively ample capacity for mass production, Tao told the Global Times.

Russia has begun production of the first batch of vaccines against COVID-19, its health ministry said in a statement released on August 15. Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 11 announced the world's first registered vaccine against the novel coronavirus, Sputnik V, which is named after the space satellite launched by Moscow in 1957.

"We are pleased to note that Russia has recently successfully completed the first phase of clinical trials of the coronavirus vaccine. Chinese and Russian pharmaceutical companies and research groups are actively communicating about conducting joint vaccine clinical trials," Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Huihui told Russian media.

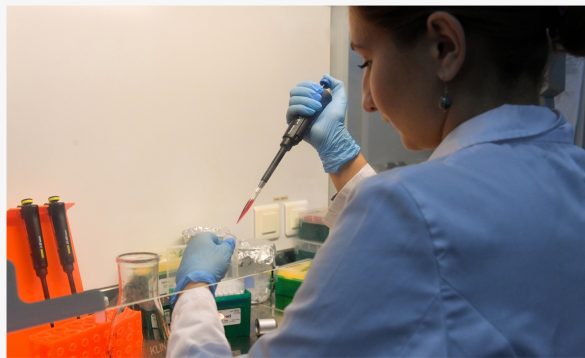
"Amid the common fight against the epidemic and the discrediting of China and Russia by the US and other Western countries, China hopes to duly promote vaccine research and cooperation together with Russia as part of the China Years of Scientific, Technical and Innovative Cooperation, as well as jointly guarantee public health goods, provide life safety guarantees to the peoples of the two states and jointly contribute to the maintenance of the international health security," Zhang said.

China has become the world's vanguard of COVID-19 vaccine developers, with five different types of vaccines currently in research. But without evidence, US accusations continue to claim Chinese hackers were attempting to steal coronavirus data on treatments and vaccines.

China will use the results of the vaccine to hit back at American nationalism on vaccine development, and use the actual product to fight back against US doubts about the safety of our vaccine, Gao Fei, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

As a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, the two leading countries in COVID-19 vaccine research - China and Russia - can exchange experience, expand vaccine samples and speed up vaccine research and development, which is meaningful to save lives all over the world under such a global public health emergency, Gao said.

Gao predicted that under the Trump administration, the US application of its vaccine research would primarily serve Americans. In contrast, China has pledged to make vaccines a global public good as China sees the world as a community with a shared future for mankind and that no single country could survive from the pandemic alone, Gao noted.



A researcher works inside a laboratory of the Guangxi Scientific Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow, Russia. Photo: AP7

Russian public bears confidence in vaccine cooperation

Unlike China, Russia is still fighting a severe COVID-19 outbreak. In the last 24 hours, more than 4,000 people have been confirmed with the virus, putting Russia's total infections at 96,189 as of Monday.

People in Russia bear great expectation to the joint development of COVID-19 vaccine between China and Russia, as well as confidence in the cooperation between the strategic partners.

"Most countries in the world are miserable in tackling the epidemic. Therefore, for current modern medicine, the vaccine may be the only way to go," Li Yunhai, a Chinese medicine doctor in Moscow, told the Global Times on Monday.

"I expected the vaccine could be successfully developed quickly... if possible, I would like to participate as well," he said. "As a doctor, I prioritize other people's safety above mine."

Ruslan Lenkha, a Saint Petersburg resident, expressed great confidence in the bilateral vaccine cooperation.

"Every country is trying to make its own vaccine at the moment. Russia and China have the huge advantage of cooperation. That's why I think our countries will do it faster than others and will help the world return to normal life," Lenkha said.

Alexander Selivanov, who lives in Moscow, similarly voiced optimism about the trials. "It can be successful. It looks logical that Russia and China will work together."

Selivanov said he hopes everybody can get vaccinated as soon as possible. "If it could help open borders, at least between China and Russia, it is already great," he said.

Jin Lei, a Chinese tour guide in Irkutsk, told the Global Times Russian residents in his town barely wear masks and work as normal.

"But the lives of many Chinese in Russia are largely affected as they rarely go out," he said. "I hope the cooperative vaccine will be successful soon."

"But I dare not be the first ones to take it, as the first batch could have some bugs... I would leave such an opportunity to the real warriors!" he joked.

Newspaper headline: Connected immunity

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 I can only wish them well for any action to make life less painful is to be admitted. Let us hope both Russian and China realize that their primary duty is to their people. If so, I wish them much success. Even if what seems evil through and through, a dim light of pro-human behavior needs encouragement through good wishes. There's no evil contest in that as our pride is stimulated and we seek to come out with one first. This race is one for good so all evils of the past cannot not be allowed to block this lane of good.
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