

Pre-orders of COVID-19 vaccine top five billion

AFP News

Although none of the coronavirus vaccines under development has proved its efficacy yet in clinical trials, at least 5.7 billion doses have been pre-ordered around the world.

First shipments of a COVID-19 vaccine created by Western laboratories have often been snapped up by the United States. Five vaccines -- three Western and two Chinese -- are in Phase 3 efficacy trials involving thousands of people.

In a surprise announcement, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed Tuesday that a vaccine dubbed “Sputnik V” -- after the Soviet satellite -- conferred “sustainable immunity” against the novel coronavirus.

As research laboratories around the world race to develop a vaccine, manufacturers have received financing to help them prepare to have millions of doses ready to administer in 2021 or even before the end of the year.

Oxford University, working with the Swedish-British pharmaceutical group AstraZeneca, hopes to have results by September while the US biotech company Moderna, partnering with the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), is aiming for the end of the year, possibly November.

US: 700 million doses

President Donald Trump has launched “Operation Warp Speed” in a bid to develop, manufacture and distribute a COVID-19 vaccine to all Americans by January 2021.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been directed to vaccine developers including nearly \$500 million to Johnson & Johnson at the end of March.

The United States has allocated funding to more companies than other nation in the hope that one of them will come up with the vaccine to counter the highly contagious virus.

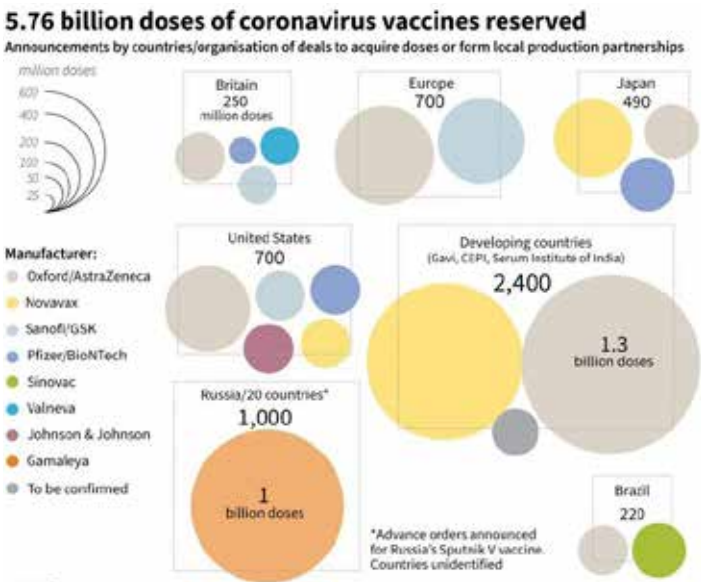
So far, Washington has handed out at a total of least 9.4 billion dollars to seven vaccine developers and signed manufacturing contracts with five of them to provide 700 million doses.

The companies involved are: Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Oxford/AztraZeneca, Novavax, Pfizer/BioNTech, Sanofi/GSK, Merck Sharp and Dohme.

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Britain, Japan, Brazil

Britain, because of Brexit, is negotiating a separate pre-order of 250 million doses from four developers.

Japan is counting on 490 million doses from three suppliers including 250 million from Novavax of the United States.

Japanese pharmaceutical giant Takeda bought the rights to a Novavax vaccine for Japan, which has funded the research. It would be produced locally.

Brazil chose a similar model, ordering 100 million doses from AstraZeneca, and partnering with China's Sinovac to produce 120 millions of “CoronaVac,” which is already undergoing testing with Brazilians.

Fauci doubts safety of Russia’s Coronavirus vaccine

AFP

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, expressed serious doubt about the safety of a Russian-created vaccine for the coronavirus.

“Having a vaccine” and “proving that a vaccine is safe and effective are two different things,” the director of the Na-



Dr Anthony Fauci

tional Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases told ABC News' Deborah Roberts in a

preview clip of an interview for National Geographic that was released Tuesday.

Fauci explained in the interview that National Geographic will broadcast in full online Thursday that the U.S. has “half a dozen or more vaccines” in development and could start administering them as soon as “next week” if “we wanted to take the chance of hurting a

lot of people, or giving them something that doesn't work.”

“But, that's not the way it works,” he said.

“So, I hope, but I haven't heard any evidence to make me feel that's the case, I hope that the Russians have actually, definitively proven that the vaccine is safe and effective,” Fauci continued. “I seriously doubt that they've done that.”

China, Russia

Clinical tests of two Chinese vaccine candidates -- Sinovac and Sinopharm -- are well underway but only a few international partnerships have been announced, the one with Brazil and a possible one with Indonesia.

Russia said 20 nations have pre-ordered one billion doses of Sputnik V and that with foreign partners it would be able to produce 500 million doses a year in five countries.

Developing countries

The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), launched in 2017 by Norway, India, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, seeks to ensure that there is “equitable access” to future vaccines.

It has pre-ordered 300 million doses from AstraZeneca for dozens of developing countries in a partnership with The Vaccine Alliance (Gavi).

Billions of doses would be produced for Asia and elsewhere by the giant Serum Institute of India (SII), the largest vaccine producer in the world.

Novavax and AstraZeneca have separately signed agreements with SII to produce a billion doses each for India and low- and middle-income countries on the condition, of course, that they prove their efficacy in clinical trials.



Bus stop newest front in South Korea’s coronavirus battle



Inside the shelters, a panel displays estimated arrival times while a screen live-streams the traffic outside

AFP

South Korea has opened a high-tech new front in the battle against coronavirus, fortifying bus shelters with temperature-checking doors and ultraviolet disinfection lamps.

Ten advanced facilities have been installed in a northeastern district of Seoul, offering protection from monsoon rains, summer heat, and the novel coronavirus.

To enter, passengers must stand in front of an automated thermal-imaging camera, and the door will only slide open if their temperature is below 37.5 degrees Celsius (99.5 Fahrenheit).

A separate camera is installed lower down to test children.

Inside the glass-walled booths -- which cost about 100 million won (\$84,000) each -- the air-conditioning systems have ultraviolet lamps installed to kill viruses at the same time as cooling the air.

A dispenser provides hand sanitiser, and users are advised to wear face masks at all times, while keeping at least one metre apart from others.

“We have installed all the available anti-coronavirus measures we can think of into this booth,” Kim Hwang-yun, a district official in charge of the Smart Shelter project, told AFP.

Free Wi-Fi is also included.

Since they were installed last week each booth has been used by about 300 to 400 people a day, Kim said.

To ensure passengers do not miss their bus, a panel displays estimated arrival times while a screen live-streams the traffic outside.

South Korea endured one of the worst early coronavirus outbreaks outside China but brought it broadly under control with an extensive “trace, test and treat” programme while never imposing a compulsory lockdown.

Kim Ju-li, a 49-year-old housewife using the new bus stop for the first time, said: “I feel really safe in here because I know others around me had their temperatures checked as well as me.”



A man checks his temperature before entering the bus shelter

Duterte says will be Russia vaccine ‘guinea pig’ as talks begin

AFP

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte will be a guinea pig for a controversial Russian coronavirus vaccine, his spokesman said on Wednesday, as the Southeast Asian nation emerged as a frontrunner for overseas clinical trials.

Manila has accepted Russia's offer to participate in clinical trials, vaccine supply and production of the drug, and Philippine health authorities said they are meeting the Russian drug developer Gamaleya on Wednesday.

Duterte has also expressed “huge trust” in Russia's efforts to stop the contagion.

“I believe the vaccine that you have produced is really



good for humanity,” Duterte said, praising Putin.

“I will be the first one to be experimented on,” he said on Monday.

Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque said that the president -- known for making controversial remarks -- was not joking.

“He's old. He can sacrifice his life for the Filipino people,” Roque said.