

Bharat Biotech-Novavax pact for bird flu vaccine

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Hyderabad: WEEKS after bird flu was reported in India, Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and Novavax of the US has joined hands to co-develop an avian flu vaccine for the Indian and Asean markets. The aim of the strategic alliance is to hasten the development of the vaccine.

Addressing a press conference, Novavax CEO Rahul Singhvi said, "it is important for us to create a single dose vaccine. The tie-up will help us scale up capacities and also reduces costs". Novavax' proprietary VLP technology produces safe vaccine products through an aseptic process that reduces contamination risk and produces high and cost-effective yields. An advantage of the technology is the ability to rapidly respond to emerging threats or new strains. There are 16 HA and 9 NA sub-types of influenza that are known to infect poultry. A combination of these types could begin infecting humans.

Singhvi told ET that the tie-up with Bharat Biotech was non-exclusive and was limited to the geographies of India and Asean nations. Novavax could sell the technology to other companies operating in different geographies.

Bharat Biotech chairman Krishna M Ella said the pandemic flu could have a devastating impact on the ,, economies of the countries and severely curtail international commerce. It is expected that an investment of \$30 million would be required for the clinical development stage of the avian flu vaccine. While there are no timelines drawn for the commercialisation of the product, it is expected to take nearly 2-2.5 years for production.

The alliance would be overseen by Dr Richard Klausner, former executive director of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr Klausner said, "the scientific community is fairly certain that the influenza pandemic will happen. We do not know when. It will lead to a disruption of world economy as no place would be safe. It is a wake-up call for all governments and it is their responsibility to take it seriously".

As per the terms of agreement, Bharat Biotech will use Novavax' proprietary virus like particle technology to develop, produce and market the avian flu vaccine. Bharat Biotech would fund pre clinical and clinical development, and also be responsible for manufacturing and commercialising the vaccine. Novavax would receive unrestricted access to all pre-clinical and clinical data and a royalty on all sales.