Preventive AIDS vaccine trial begins in Pune

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Dr NK Ganguly, director general, ICMR
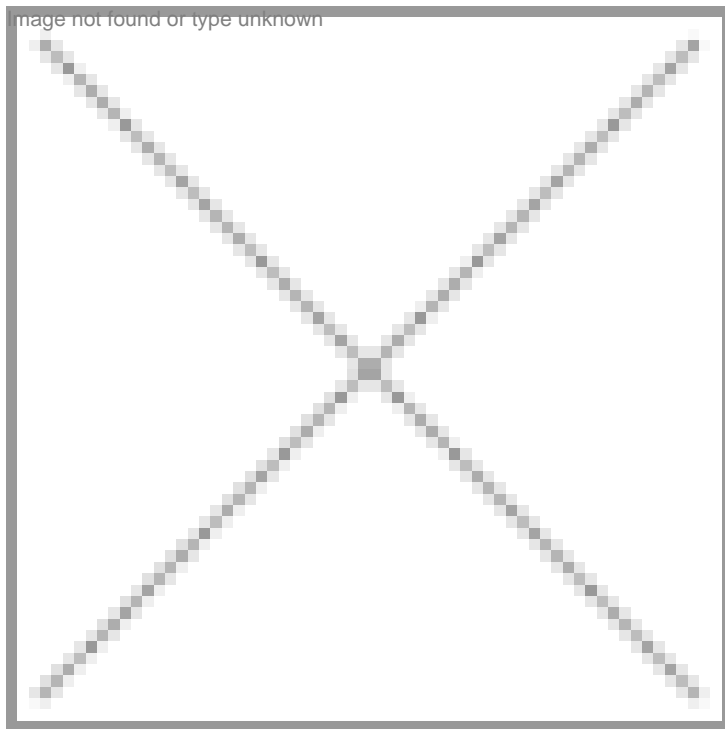
The first human clinical trial of an investigational vaccine candidate in India designed to prevent HIV/AIDS began in Pune. The trial is being conducted at Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) in Pune, and is testing a vaccine candidate named tgAAC09 (recombinant adeno-associated viral vector, rAAV). Targeted Genetics Corp., a Seattle-based biotechnology company, and Columbus Children's Research Institute (CCRI) in Ohio designed the vaccine candidate in partnership with International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

The trial is being conducted by a partnership between the Government of India through the ICMR and the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) and the not-for-profit IAVI. The trial in India is part of a multi-country Phase-I trial of tgAAC09 that is also underway in Europe; researchers in Germany and Belgium are testing the vaccine candidate in partnership with IAVI.

Announcing the trial, the union minister of health and family welfare, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, said, "Developing a vaccine to prevent AIDS is one of the most difficult scientific challenges of our time." IAVI board member and minister for science and technology, Kapil Sibal said, "Vaccine research is so critical that the health and the science and technology ministries have joined hands to provide the effort the support it needs." Sibal called for greater commitment from developed countries for HIV-AIDS vaccine research. He said a G-20 type forum is required urgently to give a boost to such research. According to Dr NK Ganguly, director general, ICMR, "With this first trial, Indian scientists are making an important contribution that will bring the world a step closer to an AIDS vaccine." Dr SY Quraishi, director general, NACO said, "The trial initiation is a great culmination of the tripartite partnership among ICMR, NACO, and IAVI. We expect to test other vaccine candidates in the coming years under this partnership."