

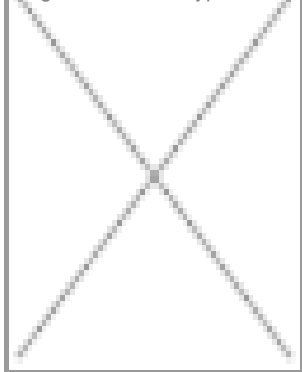
Tackling India's swine flu

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Exactly a year ago, the Influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) virus created widespread panic and havoc in many parts of India, affecting thousands of people. A year later, with the picking of the summer monsoon, the swine flu has reappeared in a big way. Over 1,000 people have tested positive for weeks.

The death toll due to swine flu is also inching up. Even as this depressing news comes from various parts of the country like Kerala that were not severely affected in 2009, there is a silver lining. The country is much prepared to combat the disease. Two indigenously developed vaccines to combat the influenza have hit the market in June 2010, exactly a year after the vaccine to act on their own to enhance the country's preparation.

Zydus Cadila was first off the block with its VaxiFlu-S, developed using a technology licensed from Novavax, on June 3. India's No.2 biotech company, Serum Institute of India, Pune, has also released its novel, intra nasal swine flu vaccine, Nasovac in the last week of June. Serum has developed it on its own with the virus strain supplied by the World Health Organization (WHO) a year ago as part of its capacity building program for influenza vaccines. With both these vaccines priced at less than Rs 200 for a standard 5 ml dose, the country's dependence on imported swine flu vaccine will be reduced considerably.

Indian companies will be in a position to supply a few million doses of the swine flu vaccine every month. More importantly, it provides the nation the ability to step up production if required in case there is a sudden spread of the flu. At the height of the swine flu scare last year, there were apprehensions that developing countries may be deprived of swine flu supplies if there was a major outbreak in the western nations. Luckily, the swine flu virus that spread all over the world in a matter of weeks, was actually a mild version. What is more heartening is the fact that three more Indian companies are currently on the verge

of bringing their swine flu vaccines into the market.

When a good product comes into the market, biotechnology companies are in the limelight. These companies are assisted ably by large number technology providers without whose expertise and support, biotech product development cannot take place smoothly. This edition of the magazine has the annual feature than ranks the BioSuppliers by revenue on the lines of the Top 20 biotech industry survey.

As expected, the BioSuppliers segment growth is intricately linked to the biotech industry's performance. So, there is surprise when the BioSuppliers industry registered only 7.5 percent growth in 2009-10. The list too does not have too many surprises, with Waters retaining its No.1 position. The BioSupplier survey is now more broad based. Almost all the major players in the industry have readily shared their sales data for the previous year with BioSpectrum. There have been some murmurs about the data captured in the previous years due to the complex nature of the industry's business. It is very difficult to separate only the services/equipments used solely by biotech researchers.

Yet, the survey results are eagerly looked forward to and every company tries to learn the right lessons from their relative positioning in the rank tables. The revenue figures have been captured for 70 percent more companies. There is a glaring gap in the Top 20 tables this time. While the production process was on, a Bangalore-based company which was ranked No.18, withdrew from the survey, citing corporate policy, leaving us with very little time to update the remaining ranks.

I look forward to your feedback on the survey and the usefulness of the rankings. It will give us the opportunity to ensure that there is no repetition of this at least in the next year's survey.

Group Editor
<sureshn@cybermedia.co.in>