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â??ICMR has committed to funding all aspects of Phase I trials of Zika vaccineâ?•

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Hyderabad-based Indian Immunologicals Ltd (IIL) has signed an agreement with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on September 12 for clinical development of Indiaâ??s first codon de-optimised live attenuated Zika vaccine. According to the Ministry of Health, as on July 22, 2024, 537 Zika cases were registered. Since no vaccine exists for Zika, this collaboration represents a crucial step in safeguarding public health against this emerging threat. In an interaction with BioSpectrum, Dr K Anand Kumar, Managing Director of IIL shares the latest developments and future goals of the company related to their vaccine portfolio.



IIL launched India’s first codon de-optimised live attenuated Zika vaccine in collaboration with ICMR. How significant is this for the Indian public health landscape?

The rise of emerging infectious diseases, particularly Zika, which poses serious risks to pregnant women, has been a growing concern. Zika can lead to severe birth defects like microcephaly, and in some cases, it causes neurological disorders such as Guillain-Barré syndrome. While no vaccine exists globally to prevent Zika, we recognised the need to take proactive measures in India. Our partnership with ICMR is a key milestone in addressing this challenge. The codon de-optimised live attenuated Zika vaccine we've developed has undergone extensive pre-clinical trials, and with ICMR’s support, we are now moving into Phase I clinical trials. This vaccine marks a major step in strengthening India’s defence against potential epidemics and pandemics.

Could you elaborate on the role of Griffith University and ICMR in the Zika vaccine’s development and how the partnership accelerates clinical trials?

Our collaboration with Griffith University in Australia laid the groundwork for developing the vaccine, particularly in leveraging the codon de-optimisation technology, which enhances the safety profile of the virus. On the Indian front, ICMR’s involvement is crucial. Their extensive trial network across India allows us to conduct first-in-human safety studies domestically, which accelerates the process and reduces dependency on international trials. This aligns perfectly with the vision of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ by ensuring that innovations are trialled and developed here in India. ICMR has also committed to funding all aspects of Phase I trials, which is a great boost to this mission.

IIL being the first to develop an indigenous Hepatitis A vaccine, ‘Havisure,’ how do you envision its impact on India’s immunisation efforts, especially for paediatric care?

The launch of Havisure is a proud achievement for IIL and for India. Until now, Hepatitis A vaccines were mostly imported, which made them less accessible to the masses. Havisure is the first indigenous vaccine for Hepatitis A, and it's available in both paediatric and adult doses. This is a significant step in enhancing immunisation coverage, particularly for children, who are most vulnerable to the disease. The paediatric dose ensures early protection, and we're working closely with healthcare professionals and government agencies to raise awareness about its benefits. This launch supports our mission to make vaccines affordable and accessible for everyone.

IIL’s Human Biologicals Institute celebrated 25 years of innovation by launching the Mabella vaccine for Measles and Rubella last year. How does this achievement reflect IIL’s journey in disease control, and what are your future goals for expanding your vaccine portfolio?

The 25th anniversary of our Human Biologicals Institute (HBI) is a testament to our long-standing commitment to public health. Over the years, HBI has developed several critical vaccines, including the world’s largest-selling rabies vaccine, Abhayrab, and now Mabella for Measles and Rubella. The launch of Mabella is significant because Measles and Rubella are still major threats globally, killing around 100,000 children annually. Through our innovations, we aim to tackle these challenges head-on. Looking forward, we are continuously expanding our vaccine portfolio, not only for human health but also for animal and aquaculture sectors. Our goal is to remain a global leader in vaccine production, supporting both India and the world.

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