

GPO wins flu jab approval : WHO signs vaccine pact to prepare for pandemic (20/5/2552)

By: POST REPORTERS

Published: 21/05/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: [News](#)

The World Health Organisation has given Thailand the green light to use an advanced vaccine production technology to make flu vaccines for domestic and global use in the event of a pandemic.

Under the landmark agreement signed by the Government Pharmaceutical Organisation (GPO) and WHO in Geneva yesterday, the state-run drug maker will be allowed to use seed viruses developed by the Institute for Experimental Medicine in St Petersburg, Russia, to produce live attenuated vaccines.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by WHO director-general Margaret Chan, and Public Health Minister Witthaya Kaewparadai, who are attending the 62nd World Health Assembly in Geneva.

The Russian live attenuated influenza vaccine technology is seen as a very promising tool in controlling a potential pandemic because it allows for the production of 30 times more vaccine doses than the standard inactivated vaccine technology.

The GPO will be able to access the technology through a licence granted to the WHO for the benefit of developing countries by Nobilon (Schering-Plough) in January, the health body said.

The recent emergence of influenza type A (H1N1), which led to the WHO lifting its pandemic alert to 5 on a scale on which 6 indicates a global pandemic with widespread outbreaks, and the continuing threat of H5N1 bird flu has raised concerns over access to flu vaccines.

WHO has also granted 70 million baht to support a one-year flu vaccine development project in Thailand, one of six developing countries chosen to join the WHO's influenza vaccine development scheme.

"A pandemic is an extreme expression of the need for global solidarity," Dr Chan said. "All countries are vulnerable, but developing countries most especially so. It is therefore most welcome that Thailand has announced its intention to contribute to the global supply of pandemic influenza vaccines."

Mr Witthaya said in order to be prepared for a flu pandemic, Thailand had invested in transforming one of the GPO's labs into another pilot flu vaccine plant. "In case there is an influenza pandemic, the two GPO pilot plants can produce up to 3 million doses of live attenuated flu vaccine per month," the minister said.

"This amount, although not adequate for the whole population of 65 million, will be enough for high-risk groups and those responsible for patient care and national security."

The GPO has also been working on setting up a 1.41-billion-baht industrial scale, avian flu vaccine production factory.

The plant, which will be built in Kaeng Khoi district of Saraburi province, will provide long-term health security for the Thai people against future flu pandemics, the minister said.

GPO managing director Witit Atthavejkul said: "If everything goes according to plan, the construction of the industrial-scale plant will begin in September 2009 and the factory is expected to be ready to start production in 2012.

"We will need strong technical support from the WHO to ensure sustainable capacity and quality."

The plant will be able to produce 60-120 million doses of live attenuated flu vaccine or up to 2-4 million doses of inactivated vaccine.

Meanwhile, the husband of the German tourist who died of pneumonia on Tuesday is in quarantine after he developed a fever.

Paijit Warachit, deputy permanent secretary for public health, said the husband had a temperature of 38C and was under close medical observation at a hospital in Hua Hin, Prachuap Khiri Khan province.

Dr Paijit said since the German woman had been cleared of H1N1 infection, the medical staff who had close contact with her and her tour guide would not be quarantined. However, their health would be closely monitored.

The 65-year-old arrived in Thailand with her family on May 12 and travelled to Prachuap Khiri Khan. She developed flu-like symptoms on Saturday and two days later she was admitted to a hospital where she died of a lung infection.

Thailand confirmed two H1N1 infections on May 12 and 22 people are now under surveillance.

The WHO yesterday reported that 41 countries had officially reported 10,243 cases of influenza A (H1N1), with 80 deaths.

Source: <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/17027/gpo-wins-flu-jab-approval>