

Australia injects \$1.87M to accelerate clinical trials for Q Fever vaccine

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Human trials to investigate the dose-effectiveness of the novel vaccine compared to the current vaccine, Q-Vax®



Australia is progressing with its new and improved Q Fever vaccine at pre-clinical trials following a \$1.87 million injection from the Australian Government.

Announcing the investment in rural workers' health near Queanbeyan NSW on 5 August 2020, Federal Regional Health Minister, Mark Coulton, labeled Q fever a major issue for regional Australians. Minister Coulton said the Government is keen to reduce the impact of Q fever and has been subsidizing the supply of the existing vaccine for many years.

“One of the potential advantages of the new vaccine is that, unlike the existing vaccine, you don't need a test before you have it. This will eliminate extra costs and time in getting vaccinated, encouraging mass vaccination,” says Minister Coulton.

Australia is tackling Q Fever with the existing Q-Vax® vaccine. Injecting the fund will further assist in clinical human trials to investigate the dose-effectiveness of the novel vaccine compared to the current vaccine, Q-Vax®.

The bacteria that cause Q Fever is spread from animals, mainly cattle, sheep and goats, but can travel up to 30 km in dry, windy conditions and infect people who have had no contact with animals. Q fever causes severe flu-like illness and can affect the health of people exposed to the bacteria, leading to chronic debilitating symptoms in extreme cases. The disease is most commonly contracted by those working with livestock on the property or in abattoirs, farmers with times of drought considered particularly dangerous. National Farmers Federation CEO, Tony Mahar, said that the funding is a significant step towards a more efficient and easier-to-access Q Fever vaccine.

Funding is provided to the Defence Materials Technology Centre (DMTC), which leads a national Medical Countermeasures Initiative with support from a range of Australian government agencies including the Departments of Defence and Health. DMTC will work with research and industry partners to manage the staged development of a new Q fever vaccine, including the Australian Rickettsial Reference Laboratory, a WHO collaborative laboratory in Geelong, Victoria. Dr Stephen Graves leads the research team.

The announcement builds on the recent investment by the Australian Government boosting funding to research rare diseases, including a study into making Q-Vax® available to a younger cohort of recipients.