

South Africa to establish first COVID mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub

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The World Health Organization (WHO) and its COVAX partners are working with a South African consortium comprising Biovac, Afrigen Biologics and Vaccines, a network of universities and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish its first COVID mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub.

The move follows WHO's global call for Expression of Interest (EOI) on 16 April 2021 to establish COVID mRNA vaccine technology transfer hubs to scale up production and access to COVID vaccines. Over the coming weeks, the partners will negotiate details with the Government of South Africa and public and private partners inside the country and from around the world.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the full extent of the vaccine gap between developed and developing economies, and how that gap can severely undermine global health security. This landmark initiative is a major advance in the international effort to build vaccine development and manufacturing capacity that will put Africa on a path to self determination."

Technology transfer hubs are training facilities where the technology is established at industrial scale and clinical development performed. Interested manufacturers from low- and middle-income countries can receive training and any necessary licenses to the technology. WHO and partners will bring in the production know-how, quality control and necessary licenses to a single entity to facilitate a broad and rapid technology transfer to multiple recipients.

The technology transfer hub will benefit from the Medicines Patent Pool's (MPP's) vast experience of intellectual property (IP) management and issuing of IP licenses. MPP is also assisting WHO to negotiate with technical partners and supporting in the governance of the hubs.