

Sanofi Pasteur to pioneer Zika Vaccine R&D

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World's leading vaccine maker Sanofi Pasteur has launched a vaccine research and development project targeting the prevention of Zika virus infection and disease.

Sanofi Pasteur leads the vaccine field for viruses in the same family as Zika virus (ZIKV), with licensed vaccines against Yellow Fever, Japanese Encephalitis and, most recently, Dengue. Sanofi Pasteur's expertise and established R&D and industrial infrastructure for the newly licensed vaccine for dengue, Dengvaxia, can be rapidly leveraged to help understand the spread of ZIKV and potentially speed identification of a vaccine candidate for further clinical development.

"Our invaluable collaborations with scientific and public health experts, both globally and in the regions affected by the outbreaks of ZIKV, together with the mobilization of our best experts will expedite efforts to research and develop a vaccine for this disease," said Dr. John Shiver, Global Head of R&D, Sanofi Pasteur.

The ZIKV is closely related to Dengue; it belongs to the same Flavivirus genus, is spread by the same species of mosquito and has a similar acute clinical presentation. Common symptoms caused by a Zika infection include fever, rash, joint swelling, conjunctivitis and headaches. However, there is a growing body of evidence linking Zika infection in pregnant women with an increased risk of a severe congenital complication at birth called microcephaly. Normally a rare condition, microcephaly results in an abnormally small head impairing brain development.

"Sanofi Pasteur is responding to the global call to action to develop a Zika vaccine given the disease's rapid spread and possible medical complications," says Dr. Nicholas Jackson, Global Head of Research for Sanofi Pasteur who will be driving the new ZIKV vaccine project. "In addition to the serious possibility of congenital complications associated with Zika, investigations are also underway to assess another reported connection between Zika and a dangerous neurological disorder."

Until recently, ZIKV was considered a rare and seemingly benign virus. However in May 2015, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) issued an alert regarding the first confirmed ZIKV infection in Brazil, and since then it has spread across the Americas. In the United States, authorities have reported a locally transmitted case of Zika in Puerto Rico, with reports of cases in continental United States in returning travelers.