

Press Cutting

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Asia to get 'cost competitive' vaccines from Abivax deal

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Several countries in Asia are set to see the availability of additional vaccines for the prevention of some of the most common bacterial diseases in the region, by way of an alliance between a new European venture and a Cuban scientific research institute.

Abivax, a young French company developing vaccines and antiviral drugs, has acquired distribution rights in a number of Asian and Latin American markets to three antibacterial vaccines already commercialized by Cuba's The Finlay Institute: TyVi against typhoid, VA-MENGO-CBC targeting type B and C meningococcus and SPIRAL for leptospirosis.

Privately held Abivax has gained commercialization rights in Asian markets including India, Indonesia and the Philippines, in addition to several Latin American countries including Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay. The first commercial sales are expected to begin next year.

Abivax said it intends to seek local partners to help support regulatory filings and market the products, based on selection criteria including portfolio fit and relations with authorities. While Abivax holds exclusive or non-exclusive distribution rights, Finlay will be responsible for the "cost competitive" production of the three vaccines, although there is no indication yet as to likely pricing.

Abivax notes the Indian typhoid vaccine market alone is estimated to be worth around \$600m annually, presenting an opportunity for its polysaccharide product using the Vi antigen. But it will face competition from numerous domestic manufacturers including Bharat Biotech International, Wockhardt and Shantha Biotechnics. Bharat launched what it claimed was the world's first typhoid conjugate vaccine, Typbar-TCV, in the country last year.

The bacterial infection, caused by salmonella and marked by high fever, is common in infants in Southeast Asia, with the World Health Organization estimating around 21 million cases globally every year.

The Finlay meningococcus vaccine is a complex of purified outer membrane vesicles of serogroup B and purified capsular polysaccharide of serotype C meningococcus, and is recommended for use from three months of age. Caused by Neisseria bacteria, it leads to meningitis, fever and vomiting, with the highest incidence in sub-Saharan Africa.

Leptospirosis, an infection spread by animals through water that can cause meningitis and pulmonary bleeding in serious cases, affects an estimated 10 million people worldwide a year, particularly in tropical areas. The typical incidence is 10 or more per 100,000 population.

Abivax/Finlay's vaccine against the disease is a trivalent whole-cell suspension of *Leptospira interrogans* active against a range of serotypes, and is recommended for use in patients from 15 years old.

The French firm said it also intends to use its new business relationships and distribution network in Asia and Latin America to develop and market its pipeline therapeutic vaccine for chronic hepatitis B, ABX203, now in Phase IIb trials.

The Hbs/Hbc virus-like particle antigen product was originally in-licensed this February from another Cuban partner, the Cuban Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, part of the 38-company BioCubaFarma grouping. Phase II/III trials are scheduled to begin in Asia by the end of this year.

Abivax was founded in December 2013 through the merger of three French biotech companies – Wittycell SAS, Splicos and Zophis – all of which have been supported financially by Truffle Capital, a French venture capital firm. Abivax's development portfolio also includes an antiviral for HIV, a therapeutic vaccine for human papillomavirus and a novel vaccine adjuvant.

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