

India begins human trials of new indigenous vaccine for forest fever

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NEW DELHI: India has moved a step closer to strengthening its defence against Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), a tick-borne viral infection that has long troubled forest-edge communities in the Western Ghats. The Indian council of medical research (ICMR) has initiated Phase I human clinical trials of a newly developed, fully indigenous vaccine after completing key laboratory and animal studies.

The vaccine programme was taken up at the request of the Karnataka government, one of the states most affected by recurring KFD outbreaks. The disease is endemic to parts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa and Maharashtra, and is associated with high fever, severe weakness and, in some cases,

fatal complications.

Developed under the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the candidate vaccine is a collaborative effort involving Indian immunologicals limited and the ICMR- National institute of Virology. It is a two-dose, adjuvanted, inactivated vaccine, with doses administered 28 days apart. Officials said animal challenge and toxicity studies have been successfully completed, and GLP-grade vaccine material has already been produced. Following approval from the national drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, the first phase of human trials has now begun to assess safety and early immune response.

If the Phase I trial shows the vaccine to be safe and immunogenic, it will progress to larger clinical trials before seeking full regulatory approval. Scientists say the new candidate aims to overcome limitations of the existing KFD vaccine, which requires repeated booster doses and has shown variable effectiveness in the field. The government said it will continue to support state governments in addressing difficult public health challenges, with the KFD vaccine effort seen as part of a broader push to develop solutions for region-specific infectious diseases using indigenous research and manufacturing capacity.