

THE SCOTSMAN

Fri 28 Oct 2005

'Vaccine' for human bird flu may be tested by year's end

JOHN INNES

A VACCINE that could protect millions of people worldwide from a potential bird flu pandemic is set for trials before Christmas, the UK's biggest drugs company announced yesterday.

GlaxoSmithKline said results of clinical trials of the vaccine against the H5N1 strain of flu that has killed 62 people in Asia would be available by the middle of next year and, if successful, the firm would then apply for regulatory approval to sell it to people.

No-one knows how well such prototype vaccines, based on the current H5N1 strain, may match a possible future pandemic strain, but they might "prime" a person's immune system so they get stronger effects from a later, better-matched vaccine.

Jean-Pierre Garnier, the firm's chief executive, said:

"There's no need to panic. We don't know whether there will be any global pandemic, but it's better to be prepared than not."

Glaxo is also expanding its flu vaccine factory's capacity and increasing production of its antiviral drug Relenza.



Web links

- [Dept of Health - pandemic flu](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en)
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en>
- [WHO - Bird Flu fact sheet](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/)
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Last updated: 28-Oct-05 00:21 GMT

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