

SA's Afrigen partners with US on mRNA vaccine research

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South Africa's Afrigen Biologics Limited has said that it will collaborate with US government researchers to develop mRNA vaccines and therapeutics.



Source: Reuters/Shelley Christians. A production scientist works with samples at the Afrigen Biologics' site in Cape Town.

The agreement will enable the sharing of scientific expertise, technical skills and materials with the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) to help Afrigen produce mRNA vaccines against Covid-19 and other diseases, said the Cape Town-based biotech start-up.

mRNA is the technology used for Covid-19 shots by market leaders such as Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc.

Both have declined international requests to share their technology and expertise, citing complexity of the manufacturing process.

Last year, the World Health Organization (WHO) picked a consortium of South African companies including Afrigen to provide poor and middle-income countries technology to make mRNA Covid vaccines.



Katja Hamilton 20 May 2022



Afrigen in February used the publicly available sequence of Moderna's Covid vaccine and made its own version of the shot, becoming the first company to do so without the assistance of the US vaccine maker.

The collaboration with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (Niaid), part of the NIH, will help Afrigen fast-track manufacturing for its vaccine's first clinical trial, said Afrigen managing director Petro Terblanche.

The partnership will also use the technology to study and develop vaccines for cancer and other diseases including HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and influenza, Afrigen said.

"This collaboration allows us to exchange scientific expertise to further this mission and support Afrigen's globally important research and vaccine discovery efforts," said Richard Koup, the acting director of the Niaid.

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