

Coronavirus**GSK and Sanofi team up on Covid-19 vaccine**

Drugmakers aim to speed up development by pairing technologies of both groups



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Leila Abboud in Paris and **Sarah Neville** in London 2 HOURS AGO

GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi, two of the world's biggest vaccine makers, are joining forces to develop a Covid-19 vaccine with the aim of getting a treatment to market in the next 12 to 18 months.

Calling the partnership of former rivals “unprecedented”, Sanofi's head of vaccines David Loew told the Financial Times that teaming up made sense because each company held “a piece of the puzzle”.

The two companies said in a joint statement on Tuesday that they plan to start phase 1 trials in the second half of this year, and if successful they aim to have “availability by the second half of 2021”.

Sanofi's vaccine candidate, which is an S-protein Covid-19 antigen based on recombinant DNA technology, needs what is known as an adjuvant to function. GSK already has a "proven pandemic adjuvant technology" that it used during the H1N1 swine flu outbreak in 2009.

Adding an adjuvant to a protein-based antigen is a well-established vaccine technique aimed at augmenting the body's immune response, thus potentially making a vaccine more effective at lower doses and facilitating mass production.

"The challenge is not just to discover a vaccine that works but to deliver it at scale and be able to make millions of doses as soon as possible," said Mr Loew.

The companies did not disclose financial details of the partnership nor how intellectual property would be divided up. Mr Loew declined to comment on specifics, saying only that definitive terms would be finalised in the coming weeks.

Scientists and pharmaceutical companies, such as Johnson & Johnson and Moderna, are [racing to](#) develop a vaccine for Covid-19, the novel virus that has already killed some 120,000 people. More than 50 vaccine [candidates](#) are being studied, and some are already in early human trials.

But experts say that it will be at least a year to 18 months before one a vaccine is available for widespread use — typically the process takes several years. After initial safety trials, larger clinical studies to test efficacy are needed, and manufacturing capacity must be ramped up.

Given the costs and risks involved, new types of partnerships to share risks are being tried as never before.

The US government is funding some vaccine development via its Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), including Sanofi's recombinant-based candidate. A public-private partnership called the [Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation](#) (Cepi) has also backed eight vaccines candidates.

Sanofi itself has [called on](#) Europe to create its own equivalent of BARDA to co-ordinate and fund vaccine research, as well as build up vaccine stockpiles as the US has long done for flu.

To speed a vaccine to market, some, including billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates, are advocating that investment begin in manufacturing capacity before efficacy of the vaccine candidates is even established. The Gates Foundation has said it will work with seven makers of a possible vaccine to develop facilities and manufacture doses. The effort will probably cost billions and require funding both from the foundation, governments and other groups.

Separately on Tuesday, China approved clinical trials on humans for two more experimental Covid-19 vaccines, which are being developed by the state-backed Sinopharm group and Sinovac Biotech.

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