

PHE plays crucial role in hunt for COVID-19 vaccine

The team has been awarded \$500,000 by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to bolster the international response to coronavirus vaccine and treatment development.

The funding comes as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) funds PHE to evaluate vaccines in their pipeline vaccine that are destined for clinical trials as early as April 2020.

The funding recognises PHE's rare combination of highly specialised facilities and researchers at PHE Porton Down, that enable a rigorous understanding of vaccine and therapeutic safety and efficacy, before new interventions enter human trials. In recent years, this expertise has been successfully used in supporting the development of the Ebola vaccine, licensed in 2019.

PHE Porton Down researchers have collaborated with colleagues at Liverpool and Bristol universities to develop 'synthetic virus' – an exact replica of the actual virus for use in the laboratory. This will enable PHE, working with national and international academic and commercial partners, to carry out rigorous evaluation and testing of vaccines and treatments that enter the clinic.

The government has previously announced £20million of funding for vaccine development, awarded to CEPI, who will award significant further funding to support PHE's work.

PHE Porton Down will start evaluation next week of the Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine that will potentially enter clinical trials in the next month or so.

Prof Miles Carroll, Deputy Director, National Infection Service, Public Health England, said:

Public Health England is uniquely positioned to support and drive the country's hunt for a coronavirus vaccine – using tried and tested methods for the rapid development of interventions for emerging diseases.

We look forward to continuing to work with world-leading academic and pharmaceutical partners to accelerate progress towards safe and effective interventions to limit the impact of this new infection as rapidly as possible.

Lord Bethell, Minister of Innovation, said:

It makes me so proud to see PHE Porton Down demonstrate its world-beating expertise with this US FDA award.

It is a powerful testimony to the expertise and commitment of the remarkable PHE team at this historic site.