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Russia to Outsource Coronavirus Vaccine Testing to Mideast

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Russia plans to conduct Phase III trials of its experimental coronavirus vaccine in the Middle East as well as at home, the head of Russia's sovereign fund told Reuters on Thursday.

Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) head Kirill Dmitriev said he expects Phase III trials involving several thousand people to begin after a 100-person Phase II trial ends Aug. 3. Two parallel Phase I trials involving 38 paid volunteers ended this week, with officials playing up the vaccine's safety but not saying whether it was effective.

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The Phase III trial will be conducted in Russia and in two unnamed Middle Eastern countries, Dmitriev told Reuters. He told a separate news conference that Russia was discussing opening a trial site and setting up a manufacturing partnership with Saudi Arabia.

Dmitriev forecast that Russia could sell up to 170 million doses to five countries with which it has manufacturing deals and reach herd immunity through nationwide vaccination by 2021.

“There’s a general sense that for so-called herd immunity in Russia you need to vaccinate between 40 million and 50 million people,” he was quoted as saying.

“So we believe we will be in good shape producing around 30 million [doses domestically] this year and then we can finalize vaccination next year,” he added.

The candidate vaccine’s developer previously expressed hopes that it would “enter civil circulation” in mid-August and companies would begin mass production by September.

The World Health Organization says at least two out of more than 100 potential vaccines under development are in final Phase III human trials.

The Kremlin has previously said the nation’s scientists are working on almost 50 different vaccine projects, while Russian scientists have said developing a vaccine is "a question of national prestige.”

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