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CHILDREN'S HEALTH DEFENSE NEWS & VIEWS

For vaccine, the financial times reported Thursday, as public health officials and media outlets sound the alarm about outbreaks on poultry and cattle farms across the country.

by **Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.**

MAY 30, 2024



The U.S. government is closing in on an agreement to fund a late-stage trial of Moderna's mRNA bird flu vaccine, the **Financial Times reported** Thursday, as public health officials and **media outlets** sound the alarm about outbreaks on poultry and cattle farms across the country.

The funding, which would be funneled through the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, or **BARDA**, is expected to total tens of millions of dollars. It could begin as early as next month, Financial Times reported, citing people close to the discussion.

The deal might include a government commitment to purchase vaccine doses for the **H5N1 bird flu** if the Phase 3 trials are successful.

The government is also in talks with Pfizer about possibly supporting its development of an **mRNA vaccine** targeting the H5 family of bird flu viruses, according to Financial Times.

The Vaccine Safety Project

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The outlet noted the opportunity to contribute to the U.S. pandemic stockpile could be a financial boon to the two mRNA vaccine makers, whose market valuations **fell precipitously** as demand for **COVID-19** vaccines waned.

Moderna's share price is up nearly 37% since the start of April, it said.

Moderna reportedly finished dosing for its mid-stage trial for the vaccine and Pfizer launched a phase-one trial for a **pandemic flu** vaccine last December.

Pfizer said in a statement on Wednesday that it "would be prepared to deploy the company's capabilities to develop a vaccine for strategic stockpiles."

Meanwhile, in a statement to **The Defender**, Moderna said it "can confirm we are in discussions with the U.S. Government on advancing our pandemic flu candidate, **mRNA-1018**."

The company added:

“The Phase 1/2 dosing of mRNA-1018 is complete, with data expected soon. The H5 vaccines in this trial cover the same **clade** as the currently circulating variant in the United States. We remain committed to using our mRNA platform to respond to public health concerns.”

The company declined to provide further comment.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (**HHS**), which houses BARDA, and Pfizer did not immediately respond to The Defender’s request for comment on the funding.

Applications for BARDA funding for an mRNA pandemic flu vaccine closed in December.



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The Financial Times **said**:

“But the bird flu outbreak has increased the urgency of talks, with federal officials acknowledging that the speed with which mRNA vaccines were designed and deployed during the Covid-19 pandemic showed their value compared with more traditional vaccine technology.”

The existing U.S. Food and Drug Administration (**FDA**)-approved **H5N1 vaccines** in the government’s Strategic National Stockpile — made by GSK, Sanofi and CSL Seqirus — are designed to protect against the current strain of bird flu. However, the cell-based vaccines rely on a more time-intensive production process than mRNA vaccines.

Major flu vaccine manufacturer CSL Seqirus **announced** today it was selected by BARDA to deliver nearly 5 million doses of its pre-pandemic bird flu vaccine to increase BARDA’s stockpile.

CSL Seqirus’s manufacturing facility, built in 2009 through a public-private partnership with BARDA, can produce up to 150 million vaccine doses.

The currently circulating bird flu virus has infected dairy cattle in nine states and poultry farms in 48 states. The virus can be fatal for poultry but does not generally cause serious illness in cattle.

Bird flu is **rare among humans**. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** **reported** two recent cases of dairy workers — one in Michigan and one in **Texas** — contracting the disease after exposure to infected cattle, although both workers experienced only mild symptoms and both fully recovered.

Michigan health officials today reported a **third human case**, also a farmworker who experienced mild symptoms. He was treated with antivirals and is recovering, according to the CDC.

Public health officials like World Health Organization Chief Scientist Jeremy Farrar and **FDA Commissioner Robert Califf** have been sounding the alarm on a potential bird flu pandemic over the past few months.

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Farrar warned that there is “great concern” that the disease, which rarely passes from animal to human and does not pass from human to human, will evolve to be more transmissible.

Califf earlier this month warned that a **potential bird flu pandemic** could be “10 times worse than COVID-19,” with a mortality rate of up to 25%.

However, the CDC continues to classify the public health risk from the H5 bird flu as “**low**.” If contracted by a human, the virus can be **effectively treated** with antiviral drugs.

Other **public health experts** have dismissed the alarmism as “overblown” and even “farcical.” Some have suggested the “**fear-mongering**” is motivated by profit.

As The Defender reported previously, the CDC, BARDA, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** have funded or are **funding gain-of-function research** to make bird flu more pathogenic and/or more transmissible in

mammals.

Rick Bright, Ph.D., former BARDA director, holds **several bird flu vaccine patents**.

The justification for the gain-of-function research is to prepare for a zoonotic outbreak, in which a virus from a bird or other animal jumps to humans.



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