

Mersey plant in £20m US deal for bird flu vaccine

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By Tony McDonough Deputy Business Editor, Daily Post

[NOVARTIS'S](#) factory in Liverpool is to supply 800,000 extra doses of its H5N1 bird flu vaccine to the US government in a deal worth more than £20m.

The Swiss pharmaceutical giant is one of three companies including Sanofi Pasteur and GlaxoSmithKline, who will supply enough doses to cover 2.7m people.

Health experts and governments across the world fear a major outbreak of H5N1 among the human population could kill millions worldwide.

Although the virus has caused human deaths in Asia and Europe that has been as a result of direct transmission from poultry. It has not yet mutated into a strain that can be passed between humans.

It is hoped the vaccine that has been developed by Novartis, formerly Chiron Vaccines, and the other suppliers will offer some protection in the event of a pandemic, although a definitive H5N1 vaccine cannot be made until a human strain appears.

The pre-pandemic vaccine ordered by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will contribute to the US National Strategic Stockpile, which is being built in accordance with the US Pandemic Preparedness Plan.

The current plan calls for availability of enough avian influenza vaccine to immunise a 20m-member critical workforce at the onset of an influenza pandemic.

This contract follows a £30m contract award from the US government that was announced in October 2005.

Jörg Reinhardt, chief executive of Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics, said: "Novartis is pleased to have been chosen to support the US government in its proactive approach to ensuring protection against the impact of a potential pandemic.

"At Novartis, we have the knowledge, skills and commitment in research and development as well as manufacturing to be a long-term partner in pandemic preparedness. We will continue working with governments around the world to proactively help address this public health concern."

Novartis acquired Chiron last year. More than 700 workers are employed at Speke manufacturing the H5N1 vaccine as well as Fluvirin, one of the world's best selling influenza vaccines.

tonymcdonough@dailypost.co.uk