

Bio Net Asia gets rights to develop dengue-fever vaccine

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After 30 years of research, the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) has passed on the technology of producing a dengue-fever vaccine to the private sector, which will take up to 10 years developing the vaccine for commercial use and have it ready for tests on large animals.

If successful, this live-attenuated recombinant vaccine – the third-generation vaccine developed from a prototype created by Mahidol and Chiang Mai University in the 30-year study that was funded by the NSTDA – would be the first of its kind in the world.

President of Bio Net Asia, Withoon Wonghankul, said yesterday the NSTDA had given his company the rights to develop the vaccine, which would cover four virus strains in one shot.

He added that the vaccine strain from the NSTDA research had high potential in being developed commercially, even though it might take up to 10 years to produce and be ready for tests on large animals.

Bio Net Asia has spent the past decade producing as well as importing and exporting vaccines. It is currently producing a vaccine for per-

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tussis, a highly contagious bacterial disease that causes uncontrollable coughing.

Meanwhile, Chiang Mai University researcher Dr Poonsuk Keerapang said the dengue-fever vaccine was developed by using genetic engineering to create a hybrid strain of viruses found in Thailand, so it could prevent illnesses from four different virus strains at the same time.

Dr Suthee Yoksan, a researcher from Mahidol University, said about 600,000 people or 1 per cent of the Thai population suffered from dengue fever, with a third of the patients developing symptoms and a fifth of them dying.