NEWS

Ebola vaccine to be tested on 30 000 volunteers

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The first doses of a vaccine against the Ebola virus are to be shipped to Liberia, the drug company GlaxoSmithKline has announced. Some 300 vials of the vaccine, a chimpanzee adenovirus type 3 vaccine, were due to arrive in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, on Friday 23 January.

Small phase I trials conducted in the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, and Mali have shown the vaccine to be safe.

It will be tested in a trial led by the US National Institutes of Health and involve up to 30 000 healthy volunteers, including frontline health workers. Ten thousand volunteers will get the GSK vaccine, 10 000 will get a placebo, and 10 000 will get an experimental vaccine. However, there is concern that because the pace of the epidemic is beginning to slow the trial will not yield enough data.

Jonathan Ball, a virologist at Nottingham University, welcomed GSK's announcement but told the BBC, "Because case numbers are starting to come down it will be harder and harder to show any impact.

"Ultimately we may be in a position in a few months' time where we don't know whether this vaccine is effective in humans."

Moncef Slaoui, chairman of global vaccines at GSK, said, "If the vaccine is able to protect people as we hope it will it could be a significant contribution to efforts to bring this epidemic under control and prevent future outbreaks."

The latest data from the World Health Organization show the epidemic to be slowing down, especially in Liberia and Guinea. There have been 21 724 cases in total in the three worst affected countries, including 8641 deaths.

Access all of *The BMJ's* content on the ongoing Ebola outbreak at thebmj.com/ebola.

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