Modern to open mRNA vaccine research and manufacturing centre in the UK

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The biotech company Moderna is to build a research and manufacturing centre in the UK which the government says will “future proof” the UK against potential emerging health threats.

The new mRNA Innovation and Technology Centre will develop mRNA vaccines for a wide range of respiratory diseases including covid-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus. The company will also establish a global clinical trial base in the UK.

Under the strategic partnership agreed in principle between the UK government and Moderna, patients will have guaranteed access to covid-19 vaccines, including those against new variants. The centre will be able to scale up production rapidly in the event of a health emergency.

The news came as Moderna announced that its new combined bivalent covid vaccine, which specifically targets the omicron variant, “demonstrates a potent neutralising antibody response against the subvariants BA.4 and BA.5.”

The results, which have not yet been peer reviewed, suggest the scale of the antibody response was similar to what the firm’s current vaccine achieved against the original version of covid-19.

Moderna will now submit the data to regulators for approval. The company said it has already produced several hundred million doses of the bivalent vaccine and could be ready to start supplying it from the end of the summer if approved.

Construction on the manufacturing and research centre, at an undisclosed location, is expected to start this year. However, the first mRNA vaccine will not be produced in the UK until 2025.

Health and social care secretary Sajid Javid said, “Thanks to this new deal, NHS patients will benefit from scientific breakthroughs and the new state of the art manufacturing centre will boost our ability to respond to the next pandemic by ensuring we’re able to produce vaccines rapidly on our own shores.”

Patrick Vallance, the government’s chief scientific adviser, said, “Rapid cutting edge vaccines were vital in the response to the covid-19 pandemic. Developing the next generation of mRNA vaccines will be crucial in boosting our ability to prevent and respond to a wide range of diseases in the future.”