

## BioNTech gets \$145m funding for African vaccine plants

Covid-19 vaccine maker BioNTech has secured up to \$145m in funding from a global coalition against infectious diseases to help build a production network in Africa for shots based on cutting-edge messenger-RNA (mRNA) technology.

By Jennifer Rigby and Ludwig Burger<sup>30 May 2024</sup>



Source: Reuters.

BioNTech and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (Cepi) said in a joint statement on Wednesday, 29 May, 2024, that the financial support was part of an expanded partnership as the German biotech firm builds an mRNA vaccine factory site in Rwanda's capital Kigali.

A future African network could produce affordable vaccines to fight malaria, mpox, tuberculosis or other health threats, they added.

The partners said they "intend to work jointly to rapidly respond to outbreaks on the African continent caused by known viral threats, or an as-yet-unknown pathogen with epidemic or pandemic potential".

The funds pledged by Cepi come on top of up to \$90m that the coalition granted BioNTech in September support the development of mpox vaccine candidates.

Cepi chief executive officer, Richard Hatchett noted that in a health emergency up to half of the Kigali plant annual capacity of around 50 million vaccines could be dedicated to making vaccines to respond to the emergency, as part of the funding deal.

He said the money was for speeding up the development of the factory and to add on the capacity to produce material for research and clinical trials for third parties, not for specific vaccine development.

"This is an important step for Africa towards its vaccine goals," said Hatchett.

BioNTech said in December it aimed to start production at the modular mRNA vaccine factory site in Rwanda in 2025, the first foreign-company mRNA vaccine manufacturing site on the continent.

It said at the time it had fully funded the facility, committing a total of \$150m.

The company, which developed the Western world's most widely used Covid-19 shot with US partner Pfizer in 2022 laid out an initial plan to enable African countries to produce its shots under BioNTech's supervision

Rival Moderna in April paused its plans to build a vaccine manufacturing facility in Kenya, following a post-pandemic decline in demand for Covid-19 vaccines.

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