



**28 August 2020**

## **UCT participating in three international COVID-19 vaccine trials**

South Africa has joined global counterparts in the search for a COVID-19 vaccine and the University of Cape Town (UCT) is participating in three international trials in the country, alongside several other universities.

According to Professor Linda-Gail Bekker, the deputy director of the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre at UCT's Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM), more COVID-19 vaccine candidates will soon be available for clinical trials in the country.

Professor Bekker said that a Johnson & Johnson product, Ad26.COVS-2, and a Novavax product, NVX-CoV2373, will both be trialled in the country as of next month. Bekker is the national principal investigator of the Johnson & Johnson trial alongside Professor Glenda Gray, the president and chief executive of the South African Medical Research Council and the protocol chairperson of this trial.

The latest developments come in the wake of South Africa's first COVID-19 vaccine trial, ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, led by the University of the Witwatersrand's Professor Shabir Madhi in partnership with Oxford University, and executed in association with the UCT Lung Institute (one of several trial sites in the country) under the guidance of Professor Keertan Dheda, the head of the Centre for Lung Infection and Immunity at the UCT Lung Institute.

"It is very important for South Africa to participate [in vaccine trials] because we can contribute to the global cause, and it helps scientists understand how South Africans will respond to these [vaccine] candidates," Bekker said.

"It also gives us an opportunity to investigate if there are any safety concerns and, importantly, to claim the vaccines once [they have] found to be effective and rolled out."

The three vaccines currently being evaluated in South Africa have been included on the World Health Organization's list of 26 most viable candidate vaccines to enter human clinical trials. Bekker said that the Johnson & Johnson trial is currently in phase three and officially kick-starts in the country next month. The Novavax and Oxford trials are both in phase two, with phase three trials planned to start within weeks.

“Typically, phase two involves hundreds of participants and phase three involves thousands,” she said.

According to Professor Dheda, participating in vaccine trials is critical.

The UCT Lung Institute is recruiting participants in the Western Cape to facilitate both screening and vaccinating for the Novavax and ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine product trials. At the end of the process, Dheda said that the data will be collated to determine the efficacy of both vaccines.

“We need to take an active interest in our future to determine if the vaccine will work in our setting. It may also facilitate vaccine access for South Africans. Historically, it has taken several years for vaccines to reach Africa,” he said.

“More than that, our participation will also help to mitigate the COVID-19 stigma.”



Professor Linda-Gail Bekker Photo: Michael Hammond/UCT

[Download photo](#)



Professor Linda-Gail Bekker Photo: Michael Hammond/UCT

[Download photo](#)



Professor Keertan Dheda Photo: UCT

[Download photo](#)

[Download soundbite by Prof Bekker 1](#)

[Download soundbite by Prof Bekker 2](#)

[Download soundbite by Prof Dheda](#)

***ENDS***

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

**Aamirah Sunday**

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer  
Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5427  
Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: [aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za](mailto:aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za)

Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)