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## PM takes stock of vaccine development by 3 firms

He visits facilities  
in Ahmedabad,  
Hyderabad, Pune

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday visited the facilities of three biotechnology companies that are testing different COVID-19 vaccine candidates. The companies, two of which have begun Phase 3 trials in thousands of volunteers, are expected to manufacture millions of doses in the first half of 2021 if the candidates pass regulatory muster.

Mr. Modi began his tour by visiting Zydus Cadila's manufacturing facility near Ahmedabad. Wearing a PPE kit, he reviewed the vaccine development process at the company's research centre.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, with Serum Institute of India officials in Pune on Saturday. • AFP

The company had commenced the Phase 2 clinical trials of its vaccine candidate, ZyCoV-D, in August.

Zydus Cadila chairman Pankaj Patel recently said the company was aiming to complete the vaccine trial by March 2021.

"Visited the Zydus Biotech Park in Ahmedabad to know more about the indigenous DNA-based vaccine being developed by Zydus Cadila. I compliment the team behind this effort for their

work. Government of India is actively working with them to support them in this journey," Mr. Modi tweeted.

He next visited Bharat Biotech's manufacturing facility in Genome Valley, Hyderabad, which is now testing 'Covaxin', a candidate developed based on an inactivated strain sourced from the Indian Council of Medical Research, which is being tested on 26,000 volunteers.

The company in a statement said the Prime Minis-

ter's visit "serves as a great inspiration to our team, and further reinforces our commitment towards scientific discovery, solving public health issues and the fight against COVID-19".

In the final leg of his tour, Mr. Modi visited the facilities of the Serum Institute of India (SII) in Pune. SII, which has partnered with pharma major AstraZeneca and Oxford University, will be applying in the next two weeks for an emergency licence to permit the use of the 'Covishield' vaccine, CEO Adar Poonawalla said.

"SII's first priority for distributing 'Covishield' would be India and the COVAX countries (which includes several in Africa)," Mr. Poonawalla said at an online press briefing.

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"We are in the process of applying for emergency use licence in the next two weeks. While as of now, we don't have anything in writing with the Centre on how many doses they plan to purchase, the Health Ministry's indication is that they are looking at 300-400 million doses by July 2021."

Remarking on the efficacy of 'Covishield' trials globally, Mr. Poonawalla said that "zero hospitalisation" had been reported during

the process. "The trials have established Covishield's efficacy as it has shown to reduce the virus in a person's system by 60%. Furthermore, zero hospitalisations were reported during the trials. What we found in these trials globally is that even if a person does get infected, it will not be a severe attack as the sterilising immunity was 60%," he said.

(With inputs from Pune, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad)

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