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Cuban Drug to Strengthen Natural Immunity in Trial Phase

CIGB 2020 Immunopotentiator is applied nasally or sublingually, and has proven effective with confirmed COVID-19 patients

By Angel Guerra Cabrera
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Given the threat posed by the new coronavirus, it is encouraging to learn that trials are underway in Cuba of a vaccine to strengthen innate immunity, to help reduce the risk of infectious agents entering the human body.

The new drug, CIGB 2020 Immunopotentiator, is applied nasally or sublingually, and has proven effective with confirmed COVID-19 patients, limiting progression to stages of greater complexity and severity, especially in older adults.

The product has been developed by the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) in collaboration with other scientific institutions, explained Dr. Vicente Vérez Bencomo, general director of the Finlay Institute of Vaccines, during the Mesa Redonda television program. He added that the vaccine is capable of stimulating the immune system at locations where the virus "enters" the body.

According to **Dr. Eduardo Martínez Díaz**, president of BioCubaFarma, the project aims to impact the disease's propagation "curve" since, as it is known, asymptomatic individuals carrying the virus can infect others or suddenly develop life-threatening symptoms, as occurs with the 20% of patients who end up in serious condition or die.

In view of this situation, the challenge has been to develop a vaccine that prevents the virus from overtaking the body's immune system and, at the same time, allows for a balance reflected in the so-called natural or innate immunity, which can help, according to the researcher, save the lives of many people and offer significant benefits for the most vulnerable groups.

The vaccine, approved for the clinical trial phase, has shown, in blood tests and tonsil and sublingual scrapings, how molecules on the cell surface are stimulated, indicating the activation of the innate immune system to viruses, explained Dr. Gerardo Guillén Nieto, director of Biomedical Research at CIGB.

> "We are working at two levels: demonstrating activation of the innate immune system, and how this activates specific immunity against the virus," said the scientist, who added that, to date, there are no vaccines for this purpose, although Cuba has several products now being perfected.

Similarly, scientists on the island are working on the development of antivirals such as CIGB

210, CIGB 300 and CIGB 258 (the latter for patients in serious condition), and is progressing on four test models that will allow the country to have its own diagnostic tools for COVID-19.

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Articles by: **Angel Guerra Cabrera**