

BALTIMORE, Sept. 26, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The University of Maryland School of Medicine's Center for Vaccine Development (CVD) has successfully competed for and received a renewed contract to conduct basic research and clinical studies of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. Support for this work to combat existing and emerging infectious diseases is provided by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

NIAID has designated the University of Maryland's CVD and eight other research centers throughout the United States as Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Units (VTEUs). Under the 10-year contract, each institution has the potential to receive funding estimated to be up to \$135 million annually over a seven-year period. New projects will be awarded during the first seven years.

"The University of Maryland's Center for Vaccine Development has long been a partner of the federal government in the clinical evaluation of vaccines. Renewal of our contract is a testimony to our expertise in helping protect people throughout the world against diseases that pose significant public health threats," says principal investigator, Karen L. Kotloff, M.D., professor of pediatrics and medicine and head of infectious disease and tropical pediatrics at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

According to Dr. Kotloff, the NIAID expanded its required scope of expertise to qualify as a VTEU for this most recent contract competition. "Future projects are likely to use molecular tools that are now available to design better vaccines and to unmask signals that lead to

immunity, while avoiding side effects," she says. As a result, the CVD team has augmented its multidisciplinary collaboration with colleagues at the University of Maryland Institute for Genome Sciences and the School of Pharmacy, both located on the University of Maryland campus in Baltimore.

The new VTEU contract has more emphasis on international studies, compared with previous contracts.

"This emphasis on global health is a great match for the CVD because our center has a large geographic reach to facilitate clinical studies in several African and Asian countries as well as Santiago, Chile

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E. Albert Reece

, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs at the

University of Maryland

and the John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor and Dean of the

University of Maryland School of Medicine

. "The Center's domestic and international staff includes experts in a variety of fields, ranging from molecular biology and immunology, to internal medicine and pediatrics, to epidemiology and biostatistics, positioning the School of Medicine to contribute significantly to the development and testing of novel vaccines and novel vaccine delivery systems."

From its beginnings in the 1970s, under the directorship of Myron M. Levine, M.D., D.T.P.H., the University of Maryland CVD has been an international leader in vaccine development at an academic institution. The CVD has made major contributions to the development of vaccines against a wide range of infectious diseases, including typhoid fever, measles, meningitis, cholera, dysentery, malaria and influenza.

"The CVD pioneered the concept of a single center that houses researchers from numerous scientific disciplines who share the common aim of studying vaccine development from various perspectives," says Dr. Kotloff. "Under one roof, we have the expertise to study how infection causes disease, which populations may be most severely affected, and the responses to an infection that produce immunity. We also can design and conduct all stages of vaccine development and testing in people, sometimes leading to licensure."

A strength of the VTEUs is their ability to rapidly enroll large numbers of volunteers into trials. This rapid-response capability is especially important for testing vaccines designed to counteract emerging public health concerns, such as the vaccine against the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus, which has become a component of the seasonal flu vaccine. Earlier this month, the VTEUs launched a national, multi-center trial of a vaccine aimed to prevent an especially virulent avian influenza virus, H7N9, which emerged in people early in 2013.

In addition to the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, the newly awarded VTEU sites include: Ba
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

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Houston, Texas
; Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center,
Cincinnati, Ohio
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Duke University
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Durham, North Carolina
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Emory University
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Atlanta, Georgia
; Group Health Research Institute,
Seattle, Washington
;
Saint Louis University
, St. Louis,
Missouri; University
of
Iowa
,
Iowa City, Iowa
; and
Vanderbilt University
,
Nashville, Tennessee
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About the University of Maryland School of Medicine Established in 1807, the University of Maryland School of Medicine

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is the first public medical school in the United States, the first to institute a residency-training program. The School of Medicine was the founding school of the University of Maryland and today is an integral part of the 11-campus University System of Maryland. On the University of Maryland's Baltimore campus, the School of Medicine serves as the anchor for a large academic health center which aims to provide the best medical education, conduct the most innovative biomedical research and provide the best patient care and community service to Maryland and beyond.

Media Contact: □ □ □ □ □ **Bill Seiler** □ □

bseiler@umm.edu or 410-328-8919

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