

courant.com/health/hc-swine-flu-protein-sciences.artapr28,0,7664684.story

Courant.com

Meriden Company Says It Could Produce Swine Flu Vaccine

By ERIC GERSHON

The Hartford Courant

April 28, 2009

A Meriden company awaiting federal approval for its first seasonal flu vaccine says it could be ready to manufacture a swine flu vaccine within six weeks, but hasn't decided whether to proceed.

Over the weekend Protein Sciences Corp. obtained the genetic code of the swine flu that has put public health officials on high alert worldwide, the company's chief executive, Dan Adams, said Monday. The company could develop a human swine flu vaccine within weeks and start making tens of thousands of doses in about six, he said.

No company currently makes a swine flu vaccine for humans, according to the Centers for Disease Control, though two major pharmaceutical companies, Roche and GlaxoSmithKline, make anti-viral medicine that can help prevent swine flu and mitigate its symptoms.

Since the weekend, at least 40 Americans in at least five states have been diagnosed with a strain of swine flu that appears to have emerged in Mexico, where about 150 deaths have been attributed to it. Protein Sciences isn't ready to take the risks involved in producing the vaccine without government money, however. The company would need to disrupt current manufacturing projects, mainly related to its seasonal flu vaccine, and doing so could delay bringing that product to market, costing it revenue, Adams said.

So far, the company hasn't been able to reach the federal health officials who control the purse strings.

"We're trying," Adams said.

Adams declined to say how much money he would seek from the government to develop and make a swine flu vaccine. He said it would depend on the number of doses sought. Privately held Protein Sciences has enough of its own capital to produce "tens of thousands" of doses, he said.

A CDC official in Atlanta was not available for comment Monday. The agency's acting head told The Associated Press the agency hasn't decided whether to order a swine flu vaccine, in part because companies would have to disrupt preparations for next flu season.

Baystate Health

Call
800-767-6612
or visit
baystatehealth.com/jobs

The image shows the Baystate Health logo at the top, which includes a stylized building icon. Below the logo is a dark, wavy banner containing the contact information. To the right of the banner are three small, circular award or seal icons.

Protein Sciences, which has 50 employees and annual revenues of about \$8 million, manufactures flu vaccines for other companies, in addition to developing its own vaccine. Its vaccine, which is not egg-based, put the company in the spotlight in 2004, when much of the global supply of flu vaccines was found to be contaminated.

The company last year agreed to a merger that failed. It is now finalizing a deal to end a lawsuit over the soured deal, Adams said.

Protein Sciences hasn't ruled out pursuing a swine flu vaccine without government assistance, but won't make that decision for several weeks, Adams said. The company might assume all the risk on its own.

"If this swine flu turns out to be a real threat, we're going to have to consider altering our manufacturing schedule to make that vaccine," he said. "It's not a major change to go from making what we're making now."

Protein Sciences is expecting to bring its first regular annual flu vaccine, FluBlok, to market within four to six months, pending government approvals. The company has begun producing hundreds of thousands of doses to demonstrate its capacity to the Federal Drug Administration and was planning to submit additional documents to the agency Monday.

Copyright © 2009, The Hartford Courant