

## \$110 million vaccine research centre to be built in Saskatoon

An advanced vaccine research station, to be constructed in Saskatoon by 2010, will put Canada at the forefront of the worldwide fight against infectious diseases such as SARS, avian influenza, hepatitis C and tuberculosis.

The International Vaccine Center (InterVac) will be a Level-3 facility for developing and testing vaccines for both human and animal diseases. About 75% of emerging diseases, including West Nile virus and variant bovine spongiform encephalopathy, are linked to animals.

The \$110 million facility at the University of Saskatchewan will have the capacity to conduct research on large animal populations, such as chickens, cattle and pigs.

“The scope of InterVac is unique, literally being able to work on hundreds of animals, and different species of animals, at the same time,” says Andrew Potter, associate director of research at the Vaccine Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO), a University of Saskatchewan facility that has been studying animal diseases nearly 30 years.

To boost Canada’s response to emerging health threats, the federal government pledged \$25 million in January for InterVac, topping up a \$24 million allocation from the previous federal government in 2005.

“Scientists predict that a new disease will be discovered every 14 to 16 months and that understanding the animal–health interface will be key in developing vaccines,” says Alain Desroches of the Public Health Agency of Canada. Canada’s capacity to prepare for emerging viruses will be “greatly increased” by InterVac.

One of the largest vaccine research

labs in North America, InterVac will be situated within a cluster of life-science institutions, including the College of Medicine, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, VIDO and the Synchrotron, which has 1 of only 3 biomedical imaging beamlines in the world.

“To have the veterinary school and the medical school close by is a wonderful advantage,” says Potter. “InterVac will be truly collaborative, not just on this campus, but on an international basis.”

He says the facility is expected to attract researchers from around the world, and will collaborate with the pharmaceutical industry for funding and to produce the vaccines.

The other major federally supported initiative on vaccines is the Montréal-based Canadian Network for Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics, one of the Networks-of-Centres-of-Excellence. — Amy Jo Ehman, Saskatoon

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