

Start-up from Tübingen joins fight against coronavirus

PRiME Vector Technologies receives seven-figure sum to develop Covid-19 vaccine



Dr. Ralf Amann, PRiME Vector Technologies GmbH

(Source: Melanie Amann)

(Stuttgart/Tübingen) - Newly founded PRiME Vector Technologies GmbH produces highly effective vaccines using an innovative platform technology that enables vaccine vectors to be tailored to all kinds of different requirements. Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) is giving the company 1.3 million euros with immediate effect to develop a Covid-19 vaccine. The Carl Zeiss Foundation is also contributing 150,000 euros to the project.

When the research team built around founders Dr. Ralf Amann, Dr. Ferdinand Salomon and Dr. Melanie Müller won the Science2Start ideas competition in 2016, only experts were aware of the potential significance of its platform for producing vaccines. Fast forward to 2020 and everyone now recognises that developing promising vaccines is of existential importance - and also that innovative ideas are needed to combat new diseases.

PRiME Vector Technologies GmbH is a fledgling start-up in the STERN BioRegion that makes vaccines based on a

modular principle. Thanks to its platform technology, vaccine vectors can be specifically adapted to all manner of requirements. Using a vector, genetic information can be transported into a recipient cell, from which the organism to be vaccinated can read the data and then activate the immune system in the form of antigens.

The vector the biotech company uses to make vaccines in this way is a strain of the orf virus that attenuates, that is to say is no longer pathogenic and is therefore completely harmless to humans. Orf is a contagious skin disease primarily affecting sheep and goats. The recombinant (genetically modified) vaccines obtained using this approach can be far more effective than existing active ingredients. The platform technology developed by the research team utilises the orf virus vector (ORFV) as an immune modulator for the prevention of infectious diseases and also for therapeutic tumour vaccines.

Spurred into action by the pandemic, PRiME Vector Technologies GmbH has decided to help in the fight against coronavirus. "In response to the increasingly dramatic global threat of Covid-19, we are currently developing a polyvalent vaccine candidate using our unique platform technology," explains Dr. Amann. The BMWi is supporting these efforts by immediately providing an extra 1.3 million euros of EXIST funding. What's more, the Carl Zeiss Foundation is contributing a further 150,000 euros to the project.

The University of Tübingen spin-off is currently using the premises and laboratories of the Immunology Department at the university's Inter-Faculty Institute for Cell Biology. In the long term, the researchers are keen to stand on their own feet. "We're currently involved in extremely promising discussions with investors about financing. There's a great deal of interest in our work at present," says Dr. Amann. If the team makes a breakthrough with a coronavirus vaccine, it should only be a matter of time before the necessary finance is forthcoming.

About BioRegio STERN Management GmbH:

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH promotes economic development in the life sciences industry, helping to strengthen the region as a business location by supporting innovations and start-up companies in the public interest. It is the main point of contact for company founders and entrepreneurs in the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions, including the cities of Tübingen and Reutlingen.

The STERN BioRegion is one of the largest and most successful bioregions in Germany. Its unique selling points include a mix of biotech and medtech companies that is outstanding in Germany and regional clusters in the fields of automation technology and mechanical engineering.

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