

India developing own influenza vaccine for first time: Azad

An influenza vaccine is for the first time being developed in India that would be effective against the swine flu pandemic, Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said here Friday.

'Public health challenges will continue to put pressure on our system and we have to be better prepared to respond to these challenges through effective regulation, surveillance, capacity building, supervision and care,' he said.

Azad was addressing the newly formed consultative committee attached to his ministry and comprising both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha parliamentarians.

'For the first time in India, an influenza vaccine is being developed in the country that would be effective specifically against the pandemic H1N1,' the health minister said.

Azad said the H1N1 pandemic 'highlighted the need for evidence based research and trials that will be suitable for Indian conditions and the Indian people'.

India is set to come out with a vaccine to target the influenza A (H1N1) virus in a few months. Three Indian companies - Serum Institute, Bharat Biotech and Panacea - are working towards producing this India-specific vaccine that is expected to be launched early next year.

In all, 478 people have died in India due to swine flu so far, while over 14,000 people have been affected with the contagious virus.

Highlighting the role of health research, Azad said it plays an 'important role' in finding solutions to India's health problems and thus improving the country's health status.

The minister said a separate Department for Health Research had been set up in 2007 with this aim in mind.

On the H1N1 virus, Azad said his ministry 'has left no stone unturned to expand laboratory testing facilities in many parts of the country to meet public health challenges more effectively and with more evidence'.

'The H1N1 pandemic has helped us realise where we need to step up our efforts and how we need to sensitize the community in facing up to some of these challenges,' he added.

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