

Aussies have a nose for a cure

SUE DUNLEVY

A NASAL spray that not only stops the virus that causes COVID-19 but also prevents the common cold and influenza is being developed by Australian scientists.

Researchers behind the drug describe it as “amazing” and say it has the potential to combat not just COVID-19, but all future pandemics.

A trial published in Biorxiv today found the drug delivered a 96 per cent reduction in the amount of virus that causes COVID-19 in ferrets.

The study, which has not yet been peer reviewed, was carried out by Public Health England, the equivalent of our CSIRO.

The nasal spray doesn't target a specific virus, but instead primes the immune system to fight off any type of virus, according to Associate Professor Nathan Bartlett (right), who is head of Viral Immunology at the Hunter Medical Research Institute.



The nasal spray is not a treatment or a vaccine, but a preventive measure that works by stimulating a natural process in our innate immune system, the body's first line of defence against pathogens.

The immune stimulant is cheap to produce, works within 24 hours — much faster than a vaccine — and could be used twice a week to prevent infection with coronavirus.

It uses a synthetic molecule called INNA-051, discovered six years ago by Doherty Institute scientist Professor David Jackson.

Development began long before the coronavirus outbreak. Australian biotech company Ena Respiratory says the product could be made in Australia and sent worldwide.