

NEWS

Hunter researchers help combat COVID

BY MATTHEW KELLY

HUNTER Medical Research Institute respiratory researchers have played a critical role in the development of a new nasal spray treatment that could protect people from COVID-19 infection and prevent its transmission.

The treatment, known as INNA-051, was developed by Australian biotech company, Ena Respiratory, to boost the natural human immune system to fight common colds and flu in the nose and throat and to prevent severe lung disease.

The treatment has also proved remarkably successful in reducing COVID-19 viral replication.

Research published on Monday in the biomedical pre-publication research site, medRxiv, shows the spray reduced viral replication and shedding in the nose and throat by up to 96 per cent in a gold-standard animal study led by Public Health England's deputy director, Professor Miles Carroll.

Associate Professor Nathan Bartlett from the University of Newcastle, and head of HMRI's viral immunology and respiratory dis-



BREAKTHROUGH: Associate Professor Nathan Bartlett from the University of Newcastle, and head of HMRI's viral immunology and respiratory disease group.

ease group, is one of the Ena Respiratory's key advisors and research collaborators.

"We were researching INNA-051 prior to COVID-19 and discovered that it is very effective at priming the airways to more rapidly and effectively respond to a viral infection," Associate Professor Bartlett said.

"The proof of concept data generated by HMRI's team was instrumental in ensuring the treatment was ideally

placed to be tested against the virus that causes COVID-19," he said.

The INNA-051 compound works by stimulating the innate immune system, the first line of defence against viruses.

If successful in clinical trials, INNA-051 will complement the protection provided by vaccines, particularly in groups in which a vaccine is likely to be less effective such as the elderly and those

with chronic lung disease.

Subject to successful toxicity studies and regulatory approval, Ena Respiratory could be ready to test INNA-051 in human trials in less than four months.

The company says it will be a self-administered nasal spray that is easy to manufacture and will be widely available.

The company is seeking additional funding to accelerate the nasal spray's clinical

development and global distribution.

Director of HMRI, Professor Tom Walley said the project was another example of how the institute's researchers were involved in leading international, translational research into treatments that improve people's wellbeing and save lives. HMRI provided seed-funding to Associate Professor Bartlett to support his research into COVID-19.

■ MORE ON COVID: P14

States must 'do their bit': Deputy

DEPUTY Prime Minister Michael McCormack has urged states to "do their bit too" and open their borders, as the federal government promised to underwrite hundreds of millions of dollars worth of flights until at least next year.

He will today announce an extension to the domestic aviation network support and the regional airline network support programs as part of the budget.

Under the domestic aviation network support program, the government has subsidised the cost of keeping the 50 busiest air routes running. It would be extended until January 31 next year.

Through the regional airline network support program, the government has supported up to 270 weekly return services on 114 routes to 111 regional and remote locations. It will now continue until March 28, 2021.

More than \$150 million has been spent on these programs to date, with the extension likely to cost hundreds of millions of dollars more.

"We need the states and territories to do their bit too as we again encourage the continued easing of border restrictions," Mr McCormack said.

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WEATHER

TODAY



Min: 8°C Max: 19°C

TOMORROW



Min: 7°C Max: 22°C

CONTACTS

The Newcastle Herald is published six days a week.

Website: newcastleherald.com.au

News: (02) 4979 5999 | Text: 0427 154 176

Email: news@newcastleherald.com.au

Advertising: (02) 4979 5000 | advertising@newcastleherald.com.au

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