Vaccine trial brings hope

AU-commissioned programme intends to have injection by first quarter of next year

"It is good news that South Africa is running a vaccine trial and we aim to have the vaccine in six months. We just have to hold our breath for better results after we have tried to find a vaccine for HIV/SIV in our laboratory," said De Oliveira.

Professor Cyril Ramaphosa who is chairperson of the AU has supported the initiative.

He told the commission that success in developing and providing access to a safe vaccine requires an innovative and collaborative approach, with significant local manufacturing in Africa.

“We need to support the contribution of African scientists and health-care professionals. We need to act with urgency,” Ramaphosa was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, Wits University Professor Shabir Madhi, who was involved in another vaccine trial to limit the spread of the virus, said his trial was not necessarily designed for the coronavirus, but the aim was to stop human infections. He said the injection would stop the virus from spreading after the body has produced enough proteins to boost the immune system. The antibodies would prevent infections.

He said South Africa should be taking the lead with other developed countries and not lag in science.

"We do not force people to form part of the study. People come on their own accord irrespective of their socio-economic status and race. The participants are well informed with what the study is about, once we are convinced that they fully understand we allow them to participate."

"We have a range of people representing different race groups and classes who come for volunteering, others have been turned away because of the numbers we have already received."

"We do not force people to form part of the study. People come on their own accord irrespective of their socio-economic status and race. The study is done where clinics and public hospitals are located," Madhi said.

However, Durban residents would have to wait until logistical constraints have been sorted, which is likely to be by September.

He said the study has two phases, concentrating on the safety of the vaccine and the best dosing schedule.

"We also want to see whether the vaccine can protect against Covid-19," he said.

"The participants will be followed up for at least six months, to see whether the study has produced the required outcomes," he said.