

Cuba's 'Cancer Vaccine' Could Be Coming to America

The recent thawing of relations between the United States and Cuba is opening the door for a new lung cancer vaccine to come stateside.

The vaccine, called CimaVax, was developed by the Center for Molecular Immunology in Havana, Cuba, and is designed to treat lung cancer.

CimaVax is an injection given to adults who are at high risk of getting this cancer, such as heavy smokers or people who have already had surgery to remove a lung tumor. It isn't the kind of preventative vaccine given to children.

Now that diplomatic relations are normalizing between the United States and Cuba, part of that effort involves an agreement with CMI to bring CimaVax to Buffalo, New York's Roswell Park Cancer Institute for testing.

If all goes well, CimaVax would be available for public use in about five years.

CimaVax trials have already been conducted in Cuba on about 1,000 people, and an additional 4,000 people have been tested in Europe.

However, U.S. law requires any drug that is administered in this country to undergo research testing here, and must be approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Previous trials have revealed great promise for CimaVax for people with, or at risk of getting, lung cancer, the deadliest type of cancer. Clinical trials showed the vaccine extended the lives of cancer patients by more than a year, compared to people who weren't treated with it.

The results showed people under the age of 60 responded the best. The vaccine is administered in the shoulder once a month and the side effects are mild.

CimaVax is not a cure for cancer. It only slows its growth by targeting the EGF protein, which tells cells to grow and divide. It stimulates antibodies that bind to EGF, thereby stopping the protein from attaching to the receptors on cancer cells and allowing them to multiply.

In addition to lung cancer, CimaVax may also be used on five other cancers: breast, pancreatic, head and neck, colon and prostate.

Cuba's CMI and New York's Roswell Park Cancer Institute are also reportedly working on a different vaccine for blood cancers.

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