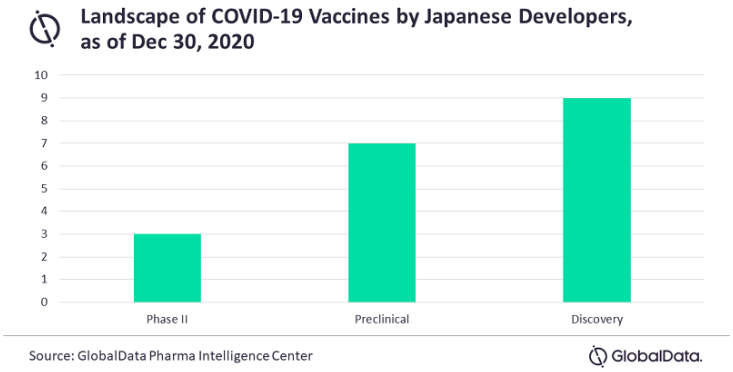
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Japan looking for comprehensive COVID-19 vaccination

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Japan is aggressively making efforts to vaccinate its population for COVID-19 with a strong focus on signing pre-orders. The country has signed multiple deals with AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax to procure sufficient COVID-19 vaccine doses with pre-orders exceeding four times of its actual population, says GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company.

In October 2020, Takeda Pharmaceuticals entered into a three-way agreement with Moderna and the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare to supply 50 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine by Moderna. Earlier, Japan reached an agreement with AstraZeneca and Pfizer to receive 120 million doses from each company. Under another deal, Takeda is preparing to manufacture and distribute Novavax's COVID-19 vaccine with funding support from the government.

The top companies in the global vaccine race-based are Moderna, Pfizer, J&J and AstraZeneca along with Sinovac and Sinopharm from China. Except for AstraZeneca and Pfizer, none of these companies have initiated trials in the Japanese population. Moderna's trial is set to start in January 2021.

Bhavani Nelavelly, Pharma Analyst at GlobalData, comments: "Japan is one of the very few countries that require additional clinical trials within the country to ensure safety. With comparatively small COVID-19 outbreak in Japan, a valid assessment in a late-stage trial in Japan will be difficult to effectively demonstrate the high efficacy of the vaccines confirmed globally. However, this may be sufficient to demonstrate safety.

"With Japan's indigenous vaccines still at Phase II stage of development, it is a wise strategy by the country to sign multiple deals keeping in mind that some of the vaccines could fail in clinical trials or the vaccines may require more than one dose."

According to GlobalData Pharma Intelligence Center, there are 17 Japanese organizations (including Osaka University and National Institute of Infectious Diseases) working on COVID-19 vaccine development. AnGes and UMN Pharma are the two Japanese contenders in Phase II stage of COVID-19 vaccine development.

Japan has passed a bill to give free COVID-19 vaccine to all its residents and reserved approximately $6.32bn (JPY671.4bn) from the emergency budget to secure COVID-19 vaccines.

Bhavani Nelavelly concludes: “Based on the current clinical development, indigenous vaccines may not be available at least until 2022 in Japan. The country lags global-front runners with vaccines that are already approved in western nations. Pfizer has already filed for fast-track approval for its vaccine and it does not require large scale trials in Japan. Considering the difficulty in vaccine development, Japan is using the strategic approach of getting vaccines from different companies, which allows complete vaccination of residents even if there are any development failures for domestic vaccines.”