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Singapore:Ã?Â Researchers at the Burnet Institute have solved a hepatitis C vaccine mystery which, once developed, could be the first ever preventative vaccine for the virus.

Currently undergoing formal preclinical studies, the vaccine is the result of breakthrough work done by Associate Professor Heidi Drummer with her team from the Institute's Centre for Virology.

Hepatitis C affects around 200 million people around the world - a preventative vaccine has the potential to have a significant global health impact.

Associate Professor Drummer and her team have overcome a major hurdle in HCV vaccine research, developing a vaccine candidate that protects against a number of different HCV strains.

"Hepatitis C has a great ability to change its structure and evade the immune response. This makes vaccine development challenging," Drummer said. "Our vaccine is unique as it contains only the most essential, conserved parts of the major viral surface protein, eliciting antibodies that prevent both closely and distantly related hepatitis C viruses from entering cells, thereby preventing infection."

Associate Professor Drummer unveiled the details about her HCV vaccine project at the Immunotherapeutics and Vaccine Summit (ImVacS) in Cambridge, Massachussets on August 13.