

Cipla, CSIR-IICT join hands for COVID-19 drugs



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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IICT director S. Chandrasekhar with Cipla chairman Y.K. Hamied. | Photo Credit: [By arrangement](#)

'It could take about six to 10 weeks to make two of the three chemical compounds'

Indian Pharmaceutical giant Cipla has voluntarily come forward to immediately manufacture three promising chemical compounds with anti-viral properties to treat COVID-19 and has sought the help of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) to make the Active Pharma Ingredients (APIs) for the same.

IICT director S. Chandrasekhar and principal scientist Prathama S. Mainkar on Tuesday told presspersons that Cipla chairman Y.K Hamied has requested them to start preparing the chemical compounds – Favipiravir, Remdesivir and Bolaxavir – so that his pharma-biotech firm can start the next phase of trials, regulatory authority approvals and subsequent mass production of the anti-viral drugs “at any cost”.

Dr. Chandrasekhar and Dr. Mainkar said several anti-viral drugs were discovered in the past few years but were halted after clinical trails due to lack of demand. IICT scientists had narrowed down to about 15 such compounds which had passed toxicology reports and the above three are in that category.

“Favipiravir and Remdesivir have already undergone clinical trials and hence, we will not require much time to make them as the raw materials are readily available. It could take about six to 10 weeks to make them. We had proactively started making the molecules in our modern Kilo lab with scientists working in two shifts. Process to start Bolaxavir molecule will begin now,” they said.

The director explained that due to artificial intelligence, deep data mining and advanced computational and mathematical models, it is not that difficult to narrow down to the chemical compounds required. “We will be making about 100gm each to begin. Cipla will follow it up with bio-equivalence tests, on dogs and human trials before approaching the regulatory authority to manufacture the drug to cure coronavirus,” he said.

“Cipla will be investing substantial resources into the making of the drug which should be in the market in the next six months. We will get royalty and this is not the first time we are collaborating with the pharma giant as we had helped them make drugs for AIDS, cancer and others,” said Dr. Chandrasekhar.

The institute is ready to supply Reverse Transcriptase PCR or RT-PCR enzyme used for COVID-19 testing kits with 40,000 units ready and the process is on to make more of them on demand.