



Stephen J. Brown, M.D. 310.358.2423

West Hollywood Research Facility has among highest number of research volunteers in North America, comments on today's announcement by VaxGen pivotal trial results for North American trial of AIDSVAX.

(Los Angeles, CA, February 24, 2003) – AIDS ReSearch Alliance of America (ARA) is extremely encouraged by the implications behind today’s announcement regarding VaxGen’s AIDSVAX Phase III vaccine trials. While the vaccine proved less effective than hoped, encouraging news was found among African American and Asians/Pacific Islanders. In those groups, the vaccine appears to have protected a significant number of infections. “This is the first time that a vaccine been shown to prevent HIV infections in humans.” said Irl S. Barefield, Executive Director of AIDS ReSearch Alliance. “And this very encouraging news – a milestone in HIV research, and very good news.”

ARA, a West Hollywood non-profit medical research organization, had the highest enrollment of study participants in California and the third highest in the United States. For the past 3 years, ARA studied 206 women and men, who were considered high-risk for sexual contact of HIV and monitoring their results. Study volunteers received 7 injections of either the actual vaccine or a placebo.

Although sample sizes were small, in African-American study participants, AIDSVAX was 78% successful in reducing infection rates, and in Asian-Americans and other non-Latino minorities the vaccine was 67% effective. “No one anticipated that the vaccine would prevent infection in close to four out of five people in any demographic group. AIDSVAX did this in black men and women at high risk for HIV-infection, a group in which infections have been rising,” Barefield said.

Dr. Stephen J. Brown, ARA's Director of Clinical Research, stated that "Results seen in the African American and Asian Pacific Islander populations are intriguing. Understanding what led to greater protection in these populations, for example, higher neutralizing antibody production, will help us better understand how to design more effective vaccines. Regardless of the results, we have learned a great deal about how to conduct vaccine studies, and this study clearly shows that it is possible to recruit a large cohort and keep them involved in a vaccine study," Brown asserted.

Matthew Rushton

One of ARA's trial participants, Donald Hicks, Ph.D. "Whether the vaccine ultimately gets FDA approval or not, we have made major advances by doing this study. The fact is that the study retained more people than was thought possible, and did so without seeing increases in unsafe behavior."

As a community-based research organization, AIDS ReSearch Alliance's largest success in recruiting vaccine study volunteers was found in some of the communities hit hardest by this disease locally. "The community was overwhelmingly supportive in our recruitment efforts. Local publications gave us free ad space and wrote articles about the study, while local bars allowed us to provide outreach to their patrons. Our 206 study volunteers are the most dedicated group of individuals I have ever met," said Michelle Simek, ARA's Outreach Coordinator. "Today's announcement clearly stresses the importance of increased participation by communities of color in clinical trials."

"There is much work to be done," said Barefield. "With 14,000 people becoming infected worldwide every day, even a partially effective preventative vaccine would allow us to save thousands of lives. We still need to aggressively move forward with research and clinical trials to find more effective interventions to both prevent and treat HIV/AIDS."

About AIDS ReSearch Alliance

AIDS ReSearch Alliance (ARA) is a non-profit medical research institute based in West Hollywood, CA, with a mission to find and accelerate the development of effective treatments and prevention technologies for those living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS. It does this through performing preclinical research and clinical trials, often collaborating with scientists from around the world. See **[www.aidsresearch](http://www.aidsresearch.org)** for more information.