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India

India's Dr. Reddy's open to making Pfizer COVID pill after Merck deal

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A 3D printed Pfizer logo is placed near medicines from the same manufacturer in this illustration taken September 29, 2021.

REUTERS/Dado Ruvic/Illustration



NEW DELHI, Nov 15 (Reuters) - Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (**REDY.NS**), one of a handful of Indian drug companies licensed to make a new COVID-19 pill developed by Merck, said on Monday it was open to making a similar pill from Pfizer, thought to be even more effective.

The new drugs, which unlike vaccines can be used to treat patients once they contract coronavirus infection, are expected to be a huge market. Merck (**MRK.N**) has given out licenses to manufacturers in developing countries to ensure a swift global supply, and companies are hopeful that Pfizer will do the same.

"Yeah, yeah, absolutely," Dr. Reddy's co-chairman and managing director, G.V. Prasad, told Reuters in an interview, when asked about making rival products from the U.S. companies.

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"Dr. Reddy's remains open to all opportunities," a company spokesperson said separately.

Prasad said Dr Reddy's, one of India's biggest drugmakers, had not yet initiated any talks with Pfizer (**PFE.N**) before the U.S. company sought regulatory permissions.

Dr. Reddy's expects India's drug regulator to approve Merck's molnupiravir as soon as the United States does. Britain and Bangladesh have already authorised the drug, and India with its 1.35 billion people could be a big market.

"India is also processing the application. Merck is also submitting the data here," Prasad said. "Approval is expected as soon as Merck gets approval in the U.S."

Molnupiravir, which Merck will itself market as Lagevrio, was shown last month to halve the chance of high-risk COVID-19 patients dying or being hospitalised. The chance is cut by 89% for adults at risk of severe disease in the case of Pfizer's drug, Paxlovid. [read more](#)

Other licensed Indian molnupiravir producers include Aurobindo Pharma ([ARBN.NS](#)), Cipla ([CIPL.NS](#)), Emcure Pharmaceuticals ([EMCU.NS](#)), Sun Pharmaceuticals ([SUN.NS](#)), Torrent Pharmaceuticals ([TORP.NS](#)) and Hetero Labs. Their deal with Merck allows them to sell the product in India and some other developing countries.

Merck has signed deals to sell more than 6 million courses of molnupiravir around the world. Bangladesh's Beximco Pharmaceuticals ([BXP.H.DH](#)) said last week it would sell a version of the drug for 70 taka (82 cents) per capsule, or 2,800 taka (\$33) for a full course. [read more](#)

Prasad said demand would dictate its production of the Merck drug, foreseeing a tough fight between the Indian companies.

"In the end, it will be a race to the bottom, it will be very competitive," he said. "There's not a lot of money to be made with these products."

(\$1 = 85.7900 taka)

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