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Korea Takes First Step Toward mRNA Vaccine Self-Sufficiency — A Key to Pandemic Preparedness

Key Highlights:

- The “mRNA Vaccine Development Support Project for Pandemic Preparedness” has been launched to obtain licenses for COVID-19 mRNA vaccines developed in Korea by 2028, with a total budget of KRW 505.2 billion.
- On Wednesday, May 14, a kick-off meeting was held to officially begin the initiative.

Osong, 15 May 2025 — The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) held a kick-off meeting on Wednesday, May 14, at The Westin Josun Seoul (Jung-gu, Seoul) to officially launch the ***“mRNA Vaccine Development Support Project for Pandemic Preparedness”***, a key initiative under the National Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan.

The meeting aimed to share the project’s implementation plan with participating R&D institutions and relevant associations involved in non-clinical R&D projects, as well as with experts from industry, academia, research, and public health sectors. It also provided an opportunity to discuss key challenges and strategies for improvement.

The mRNA Vaccine Development Support Project is a large-scale R&D initiative with a total investment of KRW 505.2 billion. Over the course of four years (2025–2028), the project will support R&D efforts spanning from non-clinical to phase III clinical trials, with the goal of obtaining licenses for COVID-19 mRNA vaccine products by 2028. In recognition of its ambitious goal and groundbreaking potential, the project was exempted from the Preliminary Feasibility Study in 2024. The total budget and project duration were finalized following an adequacy review conducted in March this year.

*Note: Phase III costs will be reallocated through an additional adequacy review as the project nears market entry.

Since October last year, KDCA has been laying the groundwork for the project, including organizing a public call for proposals for non-clinical trials and R&D related to COVID-19 mRNA vaccines. In April 2025, four implementing agencies were selected to begin full-scale R&D efforts.

KDCA is working in close collaboration with relevant ministries to provide both financial and technical support to advance mRNA vaccine development. The agency has significantly eased the R&D burden on private sector participants and, in partnership with participating organizations, is actively evaluating the safety and efficacy of vaccine candidates at each stage to ensure public safety.

If COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are successfully developed through this initiative, Korea will be able to ensure a stable supply for high-risk populations. Moreover, the country will be positioned to rapidly develop and distribute vaccines within 100 to 200 days in the event of a future pandemic, leveraging the mRNA technology. The same platform technology will also be applied to the development of vaccines for various infectious diseases, personalized cancer vaccines, treatments for rare diseases, and other high-value biopharmaceutical products.

“By achieving the goal of this project, KDCA will strengthen Korea’s vaccine sovereignty and emerge as a global leader in health security,” said Dr. Youngmee Jee, Commissioner of KDCA. “In the event of a future pandemic, we will develop vaccines swiftly using domestic technologies and capabilities to protect lives and to minimize social and economic losses.”