

CREDIT RSS FEBRUARY 29, 2020 / 12:47 AM / 15 DAYS AGO

Biotechnology trade group taps former Biogen CEO as its coronavirus czar

Rebecca Spalding

3 MIN READ



Feb 28 (Reuters) - The Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), the biotechnology industry's largest trade association, told Reuters on Friday that former Biogen Inc CEO George Scangos would coordinate its response to the global coronavirus outbreak.

Scangos, currently the chief executive of San Francisco-based start-up Vir Biotechnology, which is working on a coronavirus treatment, will lead BIO's efforts to research therapeutics and diagnostics to stave off the spread of the virus.

"The role is still evolving but it is clear someone needs to pick up the reins. It is only natural for us here at Vir to take on a leadership role," Scangos said in an interview.

A BIO spokesman said about 40 of its members have reached out to the organization to offer their expertise, while about 20 are researching therapeutics, vaccines or diagnostics that target the virus. BIO has spent the last few weeks tracking the programs already under way and helping firms coordinate with one another and government authorities, the spokesman said.

The initiative may have the most value for small biotechnology firms, which unlike their bigger peers are perennially low on cash. Some have never developed a therapy all the way through regulatory approval and have little experience working with agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Department of Defense let alone international authorities.

Vir is one of the several companies working on a coronavirus treatment. On Tuesday, Vir announced it had discovered several antibodies that bind to the coronavirus, dubbed COVID-19, after studying patients who survived SARS, a related virus.

The company said it would continue its research in partnership with Chinese drug company WuXi Biologics. Moderna Inc and Gilead Sciences Inc have also said they are researching treatments to combat the virus. Experts have said that a vaccine would likely take at least between 12 and 18 months to develop.

The latest World Health Organization figures indicate over 82,000 people have been infected, with over 2,700 deaths in China and 57 deaths in 46 other countries.

(Reporting by Rebecca Spalding in New York Editing by Leslie Adler)

Our Standards: [The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.](#)

TRENDING

Special Report: Italy and South Korea virus outbreaks reveal disparity in deaths and tactics



Like the flu? Trump's coronavirus messaging confuses public, pandemic researchers say



Spain plans partial coronavirus lockdown from Monday - draft



World closes borders, restricts travel to contain coronavirus spread



Exclusive: U.S. to add Britain, Ireland to European travel ban - airline, U.S. officials

