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From the June 3, 2005 print edition

# Sanaria gets \$4M in gov't funds for malaria vaccine

[Neil Adler](#)

Staff Reporter

[Sanaria](#) has snagged a research grant worth more than \$4 million from the Army to work on a malaria vaccine, which the biotech company hopes to have in human testing a year from now.

Rockville-based Sanaria, which is run by two former executives of [Celera](#) Genomics, has received a total of \$10 million in grants from the military and the [National Institutes of Health](#) since its founding in 2003.

CEO Stephen Hoffman says the company is on track to secure \$20 million to \$30 million in new research funds in the next few months.

"We're funding everything through phase II(a) with grants," says Hoffman, who left Celera in 2002 as senior vice president of biologics.

Before that, he was director of the malaria program at the [Naval Medical Research Center](#) in Silver Spring. His colleague at Sanaria is Bob Thompson, the vice president

of operations and a co-founder and former director of operations for Rockville-based Celera.

If Sanaria's malaria vaccine reaches later-stage testing, the company would need to raise money that goes beyond government grants. Hoffman says the funding could come in the form of an IPO or a partnership with a pharmaceutical company or vaccine maker.



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Privately held Sanaria ([www.sanaria.com](http://www.sanaria.com)), which has 21 employees, could grow to as many as 35 workers if its research goes according to plan.

The company has lab capabilities in Rockville but also has considered taking a 20,000-square-foot pilot manufacturing facility in Gaithersburg. Hoffman says he's negotiating a lease in Gaithersburg. Sanaria's decision to take the new space depends on how much grant money it receives in the near term.

There is no malaria vaccine, though a handful of firms -- including several in the Washington region -- are attempting to commercialize one. Most vaccines are years away from market, biotech industry officials say, though their worth, if successfully developed, could be substantial.

"It's a huge unmet need," Hoffman says. "There's a lot of potential here."

The [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int) estimates that at least 2.3 billion people worldwide are at risk for malaria infection. About 300 million to 500 million people are currently infected with the disease. Malaria causes about 2 million deaths annually, more than half of them children in Africa.

"Malaria vaccines are driven by the world health problem. And it's so big," says Paul Fischer, president and CEO of Gaithersburg-based GenVec ([www.genvec.com](http://www.genvec.com)), which is teaming with the Bethesda-based [Malaria Vaccine Initiative](http://www.malaria-vaccine-initiative.org) and the Naval Medical Research Center on a malaria vaccine that could reach Phase I testing in the next year.

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