



On the Front Lines: UMB Champions of Excellence: Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health

March 31, 2021 | Joanne Morrison

Fighting the virus with vigor, the School of Medicine’s renowned center is at the forefront of research on COVID-19 vaccines and therapies.

The **Champions of Excellence** campaign is a multiyear branding campaign at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) in which we highlight individuals and teams that exemplify extraordinary accomplishment and represent excellence at the University. In 2020-21, UMB is highlighting the employees who’ve done exemplary work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and The Elm will be featuring these UMB Champions, who are making Baltimore, our region, and in some cases the world a better place.

Today: Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health, School of Medicine



For more than a year, researchers at the Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) have been working tirelessly on COVID-19 research, helping to pave the way for the use of vaccines and therapies that are being administered across the country.

Under the leadership of CVD director Kathleen Neuzil, MD, MPH, FIDSA, the Myron M. Levine, MD, DTPH, Professor in Vaccinology at UMSOM, researchers quickly pivoted decades of vaccine and infectious disease research experience toward combating this deadly virus, which continues to impact millions of people around the world.

Faculty at CVD have served in critical leadership roles in U.S. and international research and policy efforts. For example, Neuzil co-chaired the COVID-19 Prevention Trials Network, a research network established by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in response to the pandemic.

(Watch video below.)

Vaccine research at CVD continues, with an emphasis on reaching the populations most impacted by COVID-19 and testing pediatric vaccines. CVD experts have launched an expansive grassroots campaign to educate the community and reach those who have been hit the hardest by this terrible virus, including members of the Black and Brown communities, the elderly, and those with underlying health risks.

“Our CVD team has worked tirelessly and meticulously to advance COVID-19 vaccines and to ensure they are reaching the most affected populations,” Neuzil said. “Our work continues as we begin testing vaccines in children and investigate booster vaccines to address the risk of COVID-19 variants.”

CVD was selected as a University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) Champion of Excellence for its yeoman efforts to combat the virus. Having seen CVD’s work up close as a participant in a COVID-19 vaccine trial, UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, says the honor is well-deserved.

“The Center for Vaccine Development has a spectacular reputation for being able to stand up vaccine clinical trials almost overnight, yet to do it in a highly efficient manner,” Jarrell said. “CVD has a really robust capability, and Marylanders should be proud to have a program like this in our state.”

In early spring 2020, CVD launched clinical trials for the antiviral drug remdesivir to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients. Results from the study quickly led to authorization from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to administer this treatment to critically ill patients. In May, CVD was the first in the country to test messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine candidates developed by Pfizer. Since then, Pfizer has received FDA emergency use authorization for its vaccine, which is being administered to front-line workers, high-risk individuals, and others as the national vaccination program progresses.

CVD also conducted Phase 3 clinical trials of Moderna’s mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, enrolling hundreds of individuals and collaborating with hundreds of research sites across the country to drive the authorization of this vaccine, which also is being administered to millions around the world.

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In December, CVD undertook its Phase 3 clinical trial of a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Maryland-based Novavax. This vaccine differs from the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines because it uses spike protein from the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. And CVD researchers are gearing up to begin clinical trials on pediatric COVID-19 vaccines.

CVD's research is part of President Biden's multi-agency collaboration led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that aims to accelerate the development, manufacturing, and distribution of medical countermeasures for COVID-19. Under this effort, thousands of volunteers have been enrolled in large-scale clinical trials, testing a variety of investigational vaccines intended to protect people from COVID-19.

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