

# Aids 'cure' trials kick off today

**MODIFIED:** VERSION OF VACCINE PROTECTS AGAINST VIRUS

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**A**s World Aids Day is commemorated today, the long-awaited study on an experimental Aids vaccine kicks off at several South African research centres.

The study, named HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN) 702, involves a new version of the only HIV vaccine candidate shown to provide some protection against the virus.

At least 5 400 women and men will be enrolled for the study,

making it the largest local HIV vaccine clinical trial.

"If an HIV vaccine were found to work in South Africa, it could alter the course of the epidemic," HVTN protocol chair and Medical Research Council of SA CEO Glenda Gray said.

"We now begin a scientific exploration that could hold great promise for our country."

The experimental vaccine regimen is based on the one investigated in the RV144 clinical trial in Thailand, led by the US Military HIV Research Programme and Thai health ministry.

The Thai trial, in 2009, was found to be 31.2% effective in preventing HIV infection over the 3.5-year period after vaccination.

The study is being conducted

at 15 research centres in the country. Study volunteers are randomly assigned the vaccine or a placebo – with injections received on five occasions over the course of one year.

Participants will be monitored through the trial and offered established methods of preventing infection.

According to the team, the vaccines do not contain whole HIV and, therefore, do not pose any danger of HIV infection to participants.

The trial is being funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the South African Medical Research Council and the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

– *Citizen reporter*



**INNOVATIVE.** Co-principal of HVTN 702, Mookho Malahleha, centre, at the Setshaba Research Centre in Soshanguve, Pretoria, yesterday. Picture: Tracy Lee Stark