

# First HIV vaccine trial participants deemed heroes

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## **Katharine Child**

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HEROES. That is the word a researcher used to describe the 5 200 volunteers who will take part in the world's first HIV vaccine efficacy study.

The trial of the experimental HIV vaccine regimen kicked off yesterday, ahead of World Aids Day today.

If successful, it could lead to the licensing of the world's first HIV vaccine.

Professor Glenda Gray, the head of the Medical Research Council,

will lead the programme to vaccinate 5 400 South Africans aged 18 to 35 at 15 sites.

The trial is co-funded by the National Institute of Health in the US and The Gates Foundation.

Gray said the council has been involved in vaccine research since 2002 and people always seem willing to be part of trials.

“They want to tell their grandchildren, ‘That injection on the counter at clinic – I was part of that’,” Gray added.

Speaking at the launch at the Setshaba Research Centre in

Soshanguve, US researcher Larry Corey described it as a “neat day”.

“The real heroes are the participants taking part in the trial.”

The experimental vaccine is derived from one used in a Thai trial in the early 2000s, which is said to have reduced the risk of HIV by 31% after three years.

Scientists have been working since 2009 to modify the Thai vaccine.

The participants will be given five injections over a year, and then monitored for 36 months.