

All-in-one flu jab to save a yearly trip to GP

By Rebecca Smith
Medical Editor

A UNIVERSAL flu jab is being developed that could end the need for annual injections and protect against all strains of the disease, a conference has heard.

Patients have shown good immunity in early tests of the vaccine, called Flu-v. If a single vaccine can be developed it will save people

returning to their GP surgery each winter and could save the NHS money.

It would also provide better protection against pandemics.

There are hundreds of strains of flu and the virus can mutate easily, with the result that each year the current jab must be matched to the three strains predicted to cause the most illness.

Millions of people are offered

the vaccination at an annual cost of around £100 million.

The new vaccine targets a section of the flu virus that does not mutate, so there is no need for repeated jabs. Early tests suggested a single dose might be effective for at least 10 years.

In the tests 48 people were given the jab, some with a further booster and others with a dummy jab.

The results showed that those

who received the vaccination and the booster built up the correct antibodies to fight flu.

There were no significant side effects and if subsequent trials are successful the vaccine could be on the market in three to five years.

Larger studies are now needed to establish how well the vaccine works against different strains of flu and how long the effect lasts.

Gregory Stoloff, the chief execu-

tive of Seek, the company developing the jab, said that the tests had borne out the scientists' predictions that it would protect against many strains of flu.

He added: "This is a true universal vaccine since it is capable of protecting animals and humans against A and B strain influenza viruses and any combinations of animal and human strains which generally cause pandemics."

This is the first non-antibody, non-DNA based vaccine and is therefore capable of manufacture quickly and simply in large amounts.

"There would be no need to wait for a pandemic to vaccinate people, this can be done well in advance of any potential pandemic strain arising."

He said the scientists were "eagerly awaiting" the results from

a first study of its safety and effectiveness.

The company is producing the vaccine with a new technique avoiding the need for hens' eggs. Because normal flu vaccines are grown in eggs, patients with egg allergies cannot use them and production is vulnerable to shortages.

Several other companies are also investigating a universal flu vaccine.