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National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Awards UTMB at Galveston Funding for National Infectious Diseases Lab

GALVESTON, Texas—The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) announced today that the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB) has been selected as the site of a new large-scale biosafety research facility that will become a key component of the nation's biodefense effort.

UTMB's approximately \$150 million National Biocontainment Laboratory (NBL) is one of two NBLs and nine Regional Biocontainment Laboratories (RBLs) being funded by NIAID. The facility at UTMB will provide much-needed laboratory space for researchers from around the country. Work inside it will focus on developing therapies, vaccines and diagnostic tests for microbes that might be used by bioterrorists, as well as on naturally occurring emerging infections such as SARS and West Nile virus.

The one-time grant to UTMB of approximately \$110 million will provide the federal share for funding construction of the NBL. Meanwhile the RBLs will receive one-time grants of between \$7 million and \$21 million each in construction funds. Each institution is also required to provide matching funds. The Board of Regents of the University of Texas System has approved revenue bonds totaling \$40 million to cover the local share required for construction of UTMB's NBL.

In February 2002, an outside panel of experts advised NIAID on its biodefense research agenda and identified the insufficient amount of biosafety level 3 (BSL-3) and BSL-4 lab space as a significant barrier to progress.

"UTMB is honored to be chosen to play this crucial role in the defense of the nation against biological terrorism and emerging infectious diseases," UTMB President John D. Stobo said. "The combination of the NBL with the remarkable expertise of our scientists and the high quality of our existing facilities will create a uniquely valuable resource in this era of new and dangerous infectious threats. This award represents extraordinary teamwork on the part of talented individuals at the university who are dedicated to addressing this important national concern."

Stanley M. Lemon, M.D., dean of medicine at UTMB and principal investigator for the NBL proposal, added: "We deeply appreciate the many hours of hard work by faculty and staff throughout UTMB that culminated in the plans for this extraordinary facility. We are equally grateful for the confidence NIAID has placed in our expertise and in our ability to do this critically important work. We look forward to partnering with NIAID to create a truly national research resource."

Work in the NBL will focus on biological agents believed to have a high potential for use by terrorists, as well as on other emerging, life-threatening microbes, all of which the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) categorizes as Category A, B and C pathogens. Examples of Category A pathogens include the bacteria responsible for anthrax and bubonic plague, as well as hemorrhagic fever viruses like Ebola. Category B includes

typhus, West Nile virus and Venezuelan equine encephalitis. Category C includes influenza virus and multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis. (Smallpox falls in Category A, but all smallpox research within the United States is restricted by international treaty to the CDC in Atlanta.)

Many of these agents cause diseases UTMB scientists either are already studying or plan to study in UTMB's new Biosafety Level 4 Laboratory (BSL-4), the first full-sized such facility to be built on a university campus in the United States. Slated to be commissioned later this fall, the BSL-4 will have about 2,000 square feet of high-containment laboratory space designed to allow researchers to work safely with the world's most dangerous pathogens. In contrast, the seven-story NBL is expected to have about 83,000 net square feet of laboratory and support space, including 13,000 square feet of BSL-4 space.

Construction of the new UTMB lab is expected to begin in January 2006, on a site immediately adjacent to UTMB's nearly completed BSL-4 lab. As with that building, safety and security will be paramount in the NBL's design, with multiple redundant containment systems in the labs, and card and keypad checkpoints built in to control access.

UTMB will own and operate the NBL. The NIAID will oversee the projects inside it. Much of the work done inside it is expected to be funneled through the eight recently announced Regional Centers of Excellence for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases (RCE); UTMB leads an RCE consortium of institutions in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arkansas and Louisiana, which earlier this month was awarded \$48 million over the next five years.

The second National Biocontainment Laboratory will be located at the Boston University Medical Campus. The nine Regional Biocontainment Laboratories sites include Tulane University in New Orleans; the University of Chicago; the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark; Colorado State University in Fort Collins; the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis; Duke University in Durham, NC; the University of Missouri in Columbia; the University of Alabama at Birmingham; and the University of Pittsburgh.

UTMB, opened in 1891 as Texas' first medical school, has grown to become a major academic health center with four schools, more than 2,000 students, six hospitals, and a diverse work force of health professionals and scientists among its approximately 14,000 employees. It is one of six health components of the University of Texas System. [See the NBL Press Kit.](#)

VYVX Information

VYVX downlink can be found at this satellite location:

SBS6.

Transponder 7

Test is scheduled @ 2:55PM CT (9/30/03)

Premiere Information

Conference Call participants dial: (800) 946-0741

Please dial in 5 to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start time.

Start time is 3:00 p.m. CT / 4:00 p.m. ET / 1:00 p.m. PT

Replay telephone number: (888) 203-1112

FYI to All

If anyone taking the VYVX downlink wants to ask a question, they will need to connect via the telephone conference call.

The Premiere operator will give telephone callers a brief introductory message at 3:00 p.m. CT

For a copy of the NIH's release go to <http://www.niaid.nih.gov>.

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