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## Scientists find anti-SARS medicine

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**SCIENTISTS conducting research in eastern China have found that a medicine used to treat schizophrenia is effective in treating patients with the deadly SARS disease, state media has said.**

Chinese and European scientists in eastern Hangzhou city found that cinanserin, used to treat mental illness since the 1970s, can inhibit the coronavirus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Xinhua news agency said.

The drug was identified as the only ready-to-use medicine among 15 possible anti-SARS remedies recommended by scientists participating in the Sino-European Project on SARS Diagnostics and Antivirals (SEPSDA), Xinhua said.

"The finding means that cinanserin could be directly prescribed to prevent the SARS disease or treat SARS patients if the fatal epidemic mounts a comeback," Peter Kristensen, an academic from Denmark's University of Aarhus, was quoted saying.

The 14 other possible remedies have to go through lengthy animal tests before being used to treat human patients, said Mr Kristensen, a participant of the three-year SEPSDA program.

The program is funded by the European Union and involves eight Chinese and European institutions. Launched in 2004, it aims to find 50 chemical compounds to treat SARS.

Scientists working for the program also confirmed today the finding of two homologous SARS coronaviruses in animals from the Netherlands and Hong Kong respectively.

Both the newly found viruses and the formerly detected SARS virus were variations of an ancient virus, which had been in animals for ages but remained unidentified, said Rolf Hilgenfeld, a professor from Germany's University of Luebeck.

The German scholar said other latent coronaviruses could pose dangers to human beings as the SARS virus did.

"People should closely monitor such viruses and their variations to effectively prevent them from endangering humans," said Mr Hilgenfeld.

SARS triggered a global health crisis after emerging in China's southern Guangdong province in November 2002, causing nearly 800 deaths worldwide including 349 in China.

*AFP*

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