

Contipharma launches saliva-based Omicron detecting PCR test in Africa

- **Developed by University of Liège in Belgium, only test of its kind available on African continent**
- **First contracts signed with Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Sudan**

Liège, Belgium, December 15, 2021 – Contipharma, a pharmaceutical company specializing in the development and marketing of targeted medical solutions, today announces that it is making a saliva-based PCR test available across the entire continent of Africa. The test, which was developed by the University of Liège (ULiège) in Belgium and is CE marked, can detect all known variants of SARS-CoV-2, including Omicron. It is the only saliva-based PCR test available in Africa and one of just a handful of its kind available worldwide.

Contipharma and ULiège first teamed up at the start of 2021. This self-collection saliva testing kit developed by the COVID-19 laboratory at ULiège offers two key advantages: first, people can collect the sample themselves, meaning no medical personnel are required; and second, the virus in the sample is inactivated immediately, which saves both time and money as this step no longer needs to be completed by a laboratory.

“It has now been shown by a number of research groups that saliva testing is as effective, if not more so, than nasopharyngeal testing in detecting SARS-CoV-2. There is even evidence to suggest that the epidemic can be better managed if saliva rather than nasopharyngeal testing is used,” explained Bernard Delhez, CEO of Contipharma.

To accurately detect different variants, every step needs to be on point — this includes taking the sample, inactivating the virus, extracting the viral genetic material and performing the PCR method. The inactivation and extraction processes developed by ULiège have proven highly effective in extracting very high-quality RNA. The ULiège process has been approved for use and widely implemented as part of the national testing program in Belgium. The process, which targets multiple rather than singular genes, also uses PCR reagents which include primers that have been specifically selected to identify and detect all known variants of SARS-CoV-2.

“This multiplex saliva-based PCR testing method detects all known variants, including Omicron, which is currently spreading throughout Africa. Since the start of the pandemic, Contipharma has delivered a range of medical supplies, including rapid blood and antigen tests. This PCR saliva-based test is the perfect addition to our portfolio and exactly in line with our company’s vision,” added Bernard Delhez.

Contipharma has already signed its first contracts to supply the tests to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Sudan. The company is currently concentrating its efforts on the market launch in Africa, but also plans to market the tests in other world regions in the near future.

According to [recent findings from the World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), only 14.2% of COVID-19 infections in Africa are currently being detected. That equates to just one in seven people with the virus. Saliva-based testing could provide a solution, since it has similar detection rates to nasopharyngeal testing but offers a number of logistical advantages. These tests can also detect infections over a longer period than their nasopharyngeal counterparts.

Looking beyond SARS-CoV-2, Contipharma and ULiège are also investigating the potential applications of saliva-based testing in the detection of other diseases found primarily on the African continent. They have launched research projects looking into three different conditions; details remain confidential at this stage.

About Contipharma

Contipharma is a pharmaceutical company that specializes in the development and marketing of targeted medical solutions. Its mission is to provide an effective response to ongoing public health issues, in particular where there is a shortage of medication or where price is a barrier to access.

Throughout the pandemic, Contipharma has been supplying the Belgian market with hand sanitizer, medical PPE in line with the latest healthcare standards, and certified face masks. In 2020 alone, it supplied more than ten million masks.

The company also invests in R&D projects run by innovative biotech and medtech start-ups in Belgium.

In addition, since January 2021, Contipharma has been supplying rapid antigen tests for the Belgian and international markets. These tests are CE marked and approved for use by the Belgian and French health authorities. They also appear in the list of approved products published by INAMI, the Belgian National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance.

Contipharma was founded in 2015 and is based in Liège, Belgium. It currently employs eight staff.

www.contipharma-protect.com

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Press and analyst contacts

Andrew Lloyd & Associates

Emilie Chouinard / Amanda Bown

emilie@ala.com – amanda@ala.com

Tel.: +33 1 56 54 07 00

@ALA_Group
