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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Ukraine, West brush off Russian referendum plans for occupied regions

KYIV, Sept 20 (Reuters) - Russian-installed leaders in occupied areas of four Ukrainian regions set out plans for referendums on joining Russia, a move Ukraine and its allies dismissed on Tuesday as a stunt by Moscow to try to reclaim the initiative after battlefield losses.

“The Russians can do whatever they want. It will not change anything,” Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in response to reporters’ questions at the start of a meeting with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

In a tweet, he added: “Ukraine has every right to liberate its territories and will keep liberating them whatever Russia has to say.”

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Washington rejected any such referendums “unequivocally”. French President Emmanuel Macron and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda both used the word “parody” to describe the planned votes.

In the apparently coordinated move, pro-Russian figures announced planned referendums for Sept. 23-27 in the Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia provinces, representing around 15% of Ukrainian territory or an area about the size of Hungary.

Russia already considers Luhansk and Donetsk, which together make up the Donbas region Moscow partially occupied in 2014, to be independent states. Ukraine and the West consider all parts of Ukraine held by Russian forces to be illegally occupied.

In a post on social media addressed to Putin, the leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR), Denis Pushilin, wrote: “I ask you, as soon as possible, in the event of a positive decision in the referendum - which we have no doubt about - to consider the DPR becoming a part of Russia.”

MOSCOW TO ORDER MOBILISATION?

Some pro-Kremlin figures framed the referendums as an ultimatum to the West to accept Russian territorial gains or face an all-out war with a nuclear-armed foe.

“Encroachment onto Russian territory is a crime which allows you to use all the forces of self-defence,” Dmitry Medvedev, a former Russian president and now hawkish deputy chairman of Putin’s Security Council said on social media.

Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the pro-Kremlin RT TV station, wrote: “Today a referendum, tomorrow recognition as part of the Russian Federation, the day after tomorrow strikes on Russian territory become a full-fledged war between Ukraine and NATO and Russia, untying Russia’s hands in every respect.”

But the United States and NATO allies that have been backing Ukraine with weapons and other support said such plebiscites would be meaningless.

If the referendum plan “wasn’t so tragic it would be funny,”



Macron told reporters in New York, where leaders were arriving for a United Nations General Assembly meeting likely to be dominated by the war in Ukraine. read more

“Russia started the war, invaded this region, bombed people, made people flee and now they are saying in this very region it’s going to organise a referendum,” Macron said.

Ukrainian national flag flies on an entrance to the recently liberated town of Kupiansk. Vehicles drive past advertising boards in Luhansk. Ukrainian servicemen repair a Russian tank captured during a counteroffensive operation in Kharkiv region.

Sullivan told reporters: “We will never recognise this territory as anything other than a part of Ukraine. We reject Russia’s actions unequivocally.”

A spokesperson for Lithuania’s Nausėda quoted him as saying: “What Russia is doing in Donetsk, Luhansk and other occupied territories of Ukraine is a parody of democracy, it’s an attempt to cover the true face of the totalitarian regime. These regions are and will be Ukraine, and Russia’s sham referendums are illegal. Lithuania will never recognize them.”

Reframing fighting in occupied territory as an attack on Russia could also give Moscow a justification to mobilise its 2 million-strong military reserves. Moscow has so far resisted such a move despite mounting losses in what it calls a limited

“special military operation” rather than a war.

Sullivan said Washington was aware of reports Putin might be considering ordering a mobilisation, which Sullivan said would do nothing to undermine Ukraine’s ability to push back Russian aggression.

‘LOUD AND CLEAR’

Russia has declared capturing all of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces to be its main aim since its invasion forces were defeated in March on the outskirts of Kyiv.

It now holds about 60% of Donetsk and had captured nearly all of Luhansk by July after slow advances during months of intense fighting. But those gains are now under threat after Russian forces were driven from neighbouring Kharkiv province this month, losing control of their main supply lines for much of the Donetsk and Luhansk front lines.

The referendums were announced a day after Ukraine said its troops had recaptured a foothold in Luhansk, the village of Bilohorivka, and were preparing to advance across the province.

Ukraine’s defence ministry taunted Moscow, which has claimed it abandoned the front in Kharkiv to “regroup” to fight elsewhere. “Why did the chicken cross the road?” the Ukrainian ministry tweeted on Monday. “Because it was regrouping.”

In the south, Russia controls most of Zaporizhzhia but not its regional capital. In Kherson, where the regional capital is the only major city Russia has so far captured intact since the invasion, Ukraine has launched a major counter-offensive.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

09/19/2022

Most Innovative Alief Community Center Opens Soon



The more than 70,000 square-foot Alief Neighborhood Center that combines three City of Houston departments (Library, Parks, & Health) will include a library, a senior center and a clinic run by the City of Houston Health Department will be open soon.

The 37-acre complex also will have a public swimming pool, skate park and soccer field and tennis courts.

Richard Ella, Assistant Director of Houston's General Service Department said, "We hope that the center will be a model that will be replicated across the city."

City Councilwoman Tiffany Thomas credited the Alief Super Neighborhood Council for keeping the pressure on the city to provide the funding, and said her first vote in the city council was to authorize the funds for the construction of the building.

We live here in this area to enjoy unique experiences like culture and diversity and many of our new residents are recent immigrants from China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Africa and Latin America. We speak over 100 dialects here in the International District now.

We are also very proud that so many businesses have moved into the International District to help create and participate in our thriving economic prosperity.

The Alief Community Center will be a new landmark for our area along with the International Culture Museum project which we are so very proud to be a part of.



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Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee
Southern News Group Chairman / CEO
Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Britain's King Charles, Britain's Anne, Princess Royal, Prince Andrew, Duke of York, Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, Britain's William, Prince of Wales, and Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, attend the state funeral and burial of Queen Elizabeth, at Windsor Castle. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls/Pool



Chilean police dogs march during the annual military parade at the Bernardo O'Higgins park in Santiago, Chile. Ximena Navarro/Chile Presidency



Palestinian demonstrators protesting the arrest of two Palestinian militants clash with Palestinian security forces, in Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman



Adnan Syed, whose case was chronicled in the hit podcast "Serial," smiles and waves as he leaves the courthouse after a judge overturned Syed's 2000 murder conviction and ordered a new trial during a hearing at the Baltimore City Circuit Courthouse in Baltimore, Maryland. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein

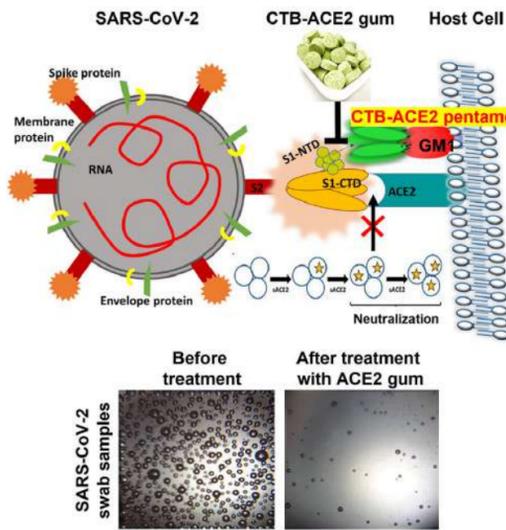


A worker removes utility poles in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona in Higüey, Dominican Republic. REUTERS/Ricardo Rojas



Police uses cooking oil to free an environment activist of "Extinction Rebellion" (XR) who has locked his hand with super glue to Berlin's street "Unter den Linden" (Under the Linden trees) during climate change protests in Berlin, Germany. Slogan on the hand reads "attention affixed". REUTERS/Christian Mang

A Chewing Gum That Could Reduce SARS-CoV-2 Transmission?



Key Points

In experiments using saliva samples from COVID-19 patients, the gum, which contains the ACE2 protein, neutralized the virus, according to research led by School of Dental Medicine scientists.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

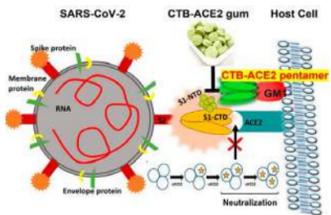
A chewing gum laced with a plant-grown protein serves as a “trap” for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, reducing viral load in saliva and potentially tamping down transmission, according to a new study.

The work, led by Henry Daniell at Penn’s School of Dental Medicine and performed in collaboration with scientists at the Perelman School of Medicine and School of Veterinary Medicine, as well as at The Wistar Institute and Fraunhofer USA, could lead to a low-cost tool in the arsenal against the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study was published in the journal Molecular Therapy.

“SARS-CoV-2 replicates in the salivary glands, and we know that when someone who is infected sneezes, coughs, or speaks some of that virus can be expelled and reach others,” says Daniell. “This gum offers an opportunity to neutralize the virus in the saliva, giving us a simple way to possibly cut down on a source of disease transmission.”

Vaccinations for COVID-19 have helped change the course of the pandemic but haven’t stamped out transmission. Even people who are fully vaccinated can still become infected with SARS-CoV-2 and, according to recent research, can carry a viral load similar to those

who are unvaccinated.



Penn Dental Medicine’s Henry Daniell and colleagues used a plant-based protein drug production platform to grow the ACE2 protein, which was then infused in chewing gum. By either blocking the ACE2 receptor or binding to the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, the ACE2 in the gum appears to be able to reduce viral entry into cells. (Image: Courtesy of the researchers)

Prior to the pandemic, Daniell had been studying the angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) protein in the context of treating hypertension. His lab had grown this protein, as well as many others that may have therapeutic potential, using a patented plant-based production system. By bombarding

plant material with the DNA of target proteins, they coax plant chloroplasts to take up the DNA and begin growing the proteins. The plant material, freeze-dried and ground-up, could be used as a means of delivering the protein. This system has the potential to avoid the usual obstacles to protein drug synthesis: namely, an expensive production and purification process.

Daniell’s past work on ACE2 proved fortuitous in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The receptor for ACE2 on human cells also happens to bind the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. Other research groups have shown that injections of ACE2 can reduce viral load in people with severe infections. Meanwhile, another line of work by Daniell and Penn Dental Medicine colleague Hyun (Michel) Koo has involved research to develop a chewing gum infused with plant-grown proteins to disrupt dental plaque. Pairing his insights about ACE2 with this technology, Daniell wondered if such a gum, infused with plant-grown ACE2 proteins, could neutralize SARS-CoV-2 in the oral cavity.

Henry Daniell of Penn’s School of Dental Medicine To find out, he reached out to Ronald Collman at Penn Medicine, a virologist and

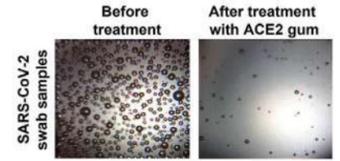
pulmonary and critical care doctor whose team, since the early stages of the pandemic, had been collecting blood, nasal swabs, saliva, and other biospecimens from COVID patients for scientific research.

“Henry contacted me and asked if we had samples to test his approach, what kind of samples would be appropriate to test, and whether we could internally validate the level of SARS-CoV-2 virus in the saliva samples,” Collman says. “That led to a cross-school collaboration building on our microbiome studies.”

To test the chewing gum, the team grew ACE2 in plants, paired with another compound that enables the protein to cross mucosal barriers and facilitates binding, and incorporated the resulting plant material into cinnamon-flavored gum tablets. Incubating samples obtained from nasopharyngeal swabs from COVID-positive patients with the gum, they showed that the ACE2 present could neutralize SARS-CoV-2 viruses.

Those initial investigations were followed by others at The Wistar Institute and Penn Vet, in which viruses, less-pathogenic than SARS-CoV-2, were modified to express the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. The scientists observed that the gum largely prevented the viruses or viral particles from entering cells, either by blocking the ACE2 receptor on the

cells or by binding directly to the spike protein.



Finally, the team exposed saliva samples from COVID-19 patients to the ACE2 gum and found that levels of viral RNA fell so dramatically to be almost undetectable.

The research team is currently working toward obtaining permission to conduct a clinical trial to evaluate whether the approach is safe and effective when tested in people infected with SARS-CoV-2.

“Henry’s approach of making the proteins in plants and using them orally is inexpensive, hopefully scalable; it really is clever,” Collman says.

Though the research is still in early stages of development, if the clinical trials prove the gum is safe and effective, it could be given to patients whose infection status is unknown or even for a dental check-ups when masks must be removed, to reduce the likelihood of passing the virus to caregivers.

“We are already using masks and other physical barriers to reduce the chance of transmission,” says Daniell. “This gum could be used as an additional tool in that fight.” (Courtesy <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news>)

Related COVID-19 Omicron Variant Detected In Houston Wastewater



‘Omicron in Houston is cause for concern but not panic,’ Houston’s chief medical officer said. (Photo/Godofredo A. Vázquez, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

The Stadler lab at Rice University’s Brown School processes approximately 200 samples of waste water to figure out which variant and what amount of the COVID-19 virus is found. Health authorities say a sample from Houston’s wastewater system tested positive for the Omicron variant of COVID-19 on Monday, the same day a woman separately tested positive for the variant in northwest Harris County.

In Houston, there’s no confirmed case just yet — but the positive wastewater indicates one could crop up soon. Mayor Sylvester Turner in a press release Monday said the

news is an important reminder to schedule a booster shot for the COVID-19 vaccine.

“Vaccines help protect us, our loved ones, friends, and colleagues in the work environment,” Turner said. “As the holidays approach, I encourage everyone to remain vigilant about their health and safety.”

Facilitating omicron here in Texas: Our abysmal vaccination rates. Only 55% 2 shots, but in Central Texas or East Texas only 40%, many counties 30%. Booster shots? You can imagine...Since the 2010s Texas has been the epicenter of the anti-vaccine movement <https://t.co/ml2mz3B-CY9>

— Prof Peter Hotez MD PhD (@PeterHotez) December 7, 2021

In Harris County, only 56 percent of the county’s 4.6 million people are considered fully vaccinated, according to the Houston Chronicle.

The Omicron finding came during routine sweeps of the city’s wastewater for the virus that causes COVID-19, according to the Houston Health Department. That testing includes several variants of the virus, as traces of it can be found in feces of those who are infected. City health officials were also testing wastewater outside a few elementary schools across Houston, according to KHOU’s Ugochi Iloka.

HAPPENING NOW: Crews with @HoustonHealth are testing waste water at local schools for Covid-19 variants like Omicron and Delta. They plan to test near 30 schools in the Houston area today @KHOU pic.twitter.com/veKMRfPnBt

— Ugochi Iloka KHOU (@UgochiKHOU) December 7, 2021

The consensus on the Omicron variant’s potential impact remains unsettled. Health authorities in the federal government are working to determine if it is any more transmissible or lethal than other strains, according to the Houston Health Department.



“Omicron in Houston is cause for concern but not panic,” said Dr. David Perse, Houston’s chief medical officer. “It’s important to remember that vaccination is our best tool to reduce cases, prevent serious illness and death, and slow the emergence of new variants.”

The city of Houston provides free COVID-19 vaccines, including boosters, to anyone 5 and older. A list of vaccination sites can be found on the city’s website. (Courtesy The Houston Chronicle)

COVID Immunity Levels Can Be Measured In 15 minutes

Houston Startup Develops Ground Breaking COVID Immunity Test

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



A team of researchers at Brevitest has developed a quick, finger-stick blood test to determine immunity to COVID-19, using a small, desktop device they invented that conducts the test using robotic technology with proprietary testing cards used to analyze the blood samples. Photographed at their offices, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Houston. (Photo/Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

A Houston startup has developed a revolutionary COVID-19 test that can measure immunity levels and determine whether or when people need a new vaccine or booster to protect themselves from the disease.

The instant test could be widely available soon, if the Food and Drug Administration grants the new device fast-track approval. Knowing personal immunity levels could become increasingly important in the face of new variants, like omicron, when people need to decide whether or when they need a new vaccine or booster shot.

The affordable, first-of-its-kind fingerstick blood test is offered by Brevitest, a company developed at Fannin Innovation Studios, a life sciences incubator in River Oaks. Researchers invented a new method for measuring antibodies, using cloud computing to process results and delivering them in 15 minutes to determine if an immune system needs a boost.

Doctors, companies and public health officials can use the tests to determine the COVID immunity levels for individuals, workforces or entire communities so they can employ more targeted strategies for slowing the disease. Since the technology is protected by patents, Brevitest can license the unique device and potentially become one of the most significant startups to emerge from Houston’s life sciences community in a decade.

Leo Linbeck III, the CEO and co-founder of Brevitest, said his company’s technology

research that has determined how many antibodies per unit of blood people need to fight off or minimize a coronavirus infection. The new test lets people know where they stand, whether from a vaccination or natural immunity to determine if they need a booster or difference vaccine Brevitest can adapt the test to detect antibodies for any variant, including omicron. Once approved, the company could begin deploying the device across the country within a few months to carry out millions of tests a week.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — worried about vaccines wearing off — recently authorized COVID-19 booster shots six months after vaccination, prioritizing those over 65 years old. But individual needs vary widely and some people lose antibodies quicker than others.

“Everyone’s biology is different, and the data seems to indicate that it could be anywhere from three months to 12 months when you see the antibody level begin to wane,” Linbeck told me. “That’s particularly problematic for older people who tend to have less of an immune response or those who are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised.”

Fast tests to detect SARS-CoV-2 antibodies have been on the market since early in the pandemic, but they only offer positive or negative results and don’t measure antibodies.

Doctors who have patients with weak immune systems have relied on a precise blood test called an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, or ELISA, that are currently done at central laboratories. But those results can take several days to return.

“We’re trying to build a point-of-care ELISA because the way we look at it, either you can have accuracy that will take time or you can have speed, and then you lose accuracy,” ex-

plained Dr. Dev Chatterjee, a co-founder and co-inventor. “The question we asked ourselves is, is there a way we can marry the two?”

The Brevitest device allows a technician to place a small blood sample on a custom-designed cartridge, which is inserted into a shoebox-sized device that produces digital diagnostic data, the same as the precision test.

The device sends the data to the cloud, where it is processed using proprietary software Linbeck wrote. Patients receive an alert and can access the results with their phones, which also allows them to compare their result with the latest COVID immunity data.

The new company can make a profit at the same \$43 reimbursement rate insurance companies pay for a central lab test, Linbeck said. Brevitest is offering tests at its lab in Houston.



Until recently, researchers were unsure how many antibodies someone needed to fend off the virus. But that changed in September when the journal Nature Medicine published a new study that used the World Health Organization standard to measure antibody levels and showed a correlation between antibody levels and infection rates.

Healthy people can use the test to determine if they need a booster or should wait a few months to take full advantage of their vaccine or illness-induced antibodies.

“There’s some evidence that if you wait longer and you let your antibody count drop, when you get that vaccine (booster), you get a bigger bump. You get more antibody production than you would if you had taken it while you still have active antibody response,” he added.

Linbeck, Chatterjee and co-inventor Dr. Atul Varadhachary founded Brevitest in 2013 to create an office-based blood testing system that would generate precision blood test results quicker. The National Institutes of Health provided a grant during the test’s early development, and the Centers for Disease Control asked Brevitest to develop an Ebola test during the 2014 outbreak.

Aquinas Companies CEO Leo Linbeck works on code for a BreviTest analyzer. BreviTest is one of the startup companies helped by Fannin Innovation Studio which helps researchers and scientists with life science product develop-

ment July 7, 2016, in Houston.

(Photo/ James Nielsen / Houston Chronicle) Chatterjee and Varadhachary said the scientific challenge was far more formidable than expected. Designing a new cartridge that prepared the blood for scanning in a new way took years. Linbeck, an engineer, worked on reliability and durability to meet exacting medical standards. “Once you actually get down to developing for the real world versus creating something for the lab, there is a whole ocean of problems that you have to solve,” Chatterjee explained.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the company refocused on measuring SARS-CoV-2 antibodies.

Brevitest is one of four life science start-ups spun out of Fannin Innovation Studio, Linbeck’s biotechnology development company. He is best known as the executive chairman of the Linbeck Group, a construction company founded by his grandfather that built many of the structures at the Texas Medical Center.

Linbeck and Varadhachary started Fannin to commercialize discoveries made at TMC. But Brevitest was Fannin’s homegrown effort to address the lengthy delay in returning accurate blood test results, a goal of many companies.



A team at Brevitest has developed a quick, finger-stick blood test to determine a person’s immunity to Covid-19 using a small, desktop device they invented that conducts the test using robotic technology with proprietary testing cards used to analyze the blood samples. Photographed at their offices, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Houston. (Photo/ Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

The most famous attempt to develop a rapid diagnostic device is TheraNas, a Silicon Valley-based company that promised a full blood workup from a tiny vial using a handheld device. Linbeck, Chatterjee and Varadhachary say TheraNas’s claims never made any sense to them, and the company’s founder, Elizabeth Holmes, is in federal court this week fighting federal fraud charges. In contrast to TheraNas, Brevitest only claims to conduct one test per fingerstick and will release its testing data for outside review, Chatterjee said.

Brevitest will never replace the broad tests best done by a central lab, for things like annual physicals, because they require a large amount

of blood and the big machines are more efficient, Linbeck said. But the team foresees doctors and clinics using Brevitest to routinely monitor patients with compromised immune systems or to track specific biomarkers for cancer and other infectious diseases.

Most breakthrough research in health care and medical devices never makes it out of the lab because investors lack the patience required to bring a product to market.



Leo Linbeck III, left, founder and chairman of Fannin Innovation Studio and managing partner Atul Varadhachary, right, develop medical technologies along with their portfolio companies like Procyron. Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014, in Houston. (Photo/Marie D. De Jesus, Staff / Houston Chronicle)

The company’s strategy of licensing bio-medical discoveries and gathering researchers under the studio’s umbrella to keep administrative overhead low until they had a commercial product. Linbeck said the investor community needs to have more conversations about the best way to finance life science startups.

“There’s a lot of misconceptions about the way that this stuff works,” he said. “Having been down in the weeds, I have a greater level of humility and respect around just how difficult this is. The human body doesn’t like to be tinkered with, which is great news for us from an evolutionary standpoint, but it’s not so great from a medical innovation development standpoint.” From an investor perspective, Linbeck said the most significant challenge was finding the right people to manage the transition from the research lab to a for-profit company. Fannin recruits and trains people with medical and life science skills who are interested in entrepreneurship.

“This is about making a big pile of money because that’s also what will sustain us over the long haul,” Linbeck said. “That means that we get involved early, and it takes longer, but when the payoff happens, I think it’ll be really-big multiples.”

Energy projects and technology investments can pay off big, too, and take less time. But Linbeck said he doesn’t mind the wait to build a business that saves lives.

“Anything really important and high impact takes a decade,” he said. “It just does.” (Courtesy houstonchronicle.com)