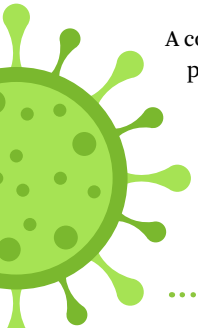
VIROLOGY IS CONTRIBUTING TO A CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

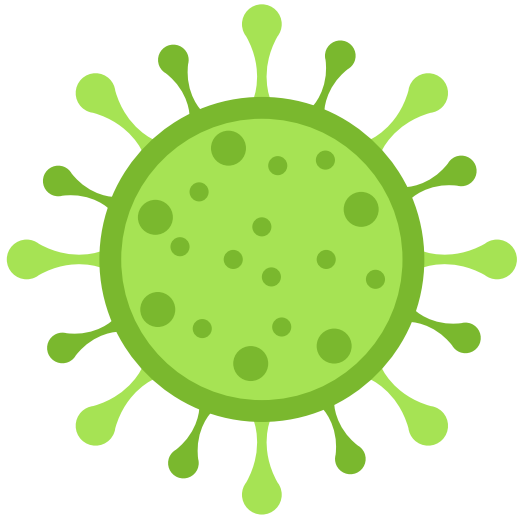
The Virology chair group in Wageningen is contributing to the development of a vaccine against the new coronavirus. The group will be making a protein that could be used in a vaccine against COVID-19. 'Other research groups, including our Danish partner, are developing other proteins,' says researcher Gorben Pijlman. 'The protein that performs best in the tests will be used in the coronavirus vaccine.'



A coronavirus has a rough surface, with proteins sticking out of it. The virus needs these spikes, as they are called, to penetrate our cells, where it makes us ill. Pijlman is going to create synthetic versions of those proteins that will prime the body's immune system to deactivate the virus. 'If the protein is injected, the body will recognize it as foreign and manufacture antibodies and memory cells. If you then catch the coronavirus, the body can make antibodies that deactivate the virus.'

TESTS

Pijlman is now in the early stages of producing these proteins, working with a PhD student and a lab technician on cloning the fragment of DNA from the coronavirus. He hopes to have an active protein in two months. But that is not the same as having a vaccine. 'We'll have to test the protein extensively, to find out if it is effective and safe. We need to try it out thoroughly on animals before it can be licensed for use.'



The Wageningen virologists are part of a European consortium led by the Danish company Expres2ion Biotechnologies. **AS**