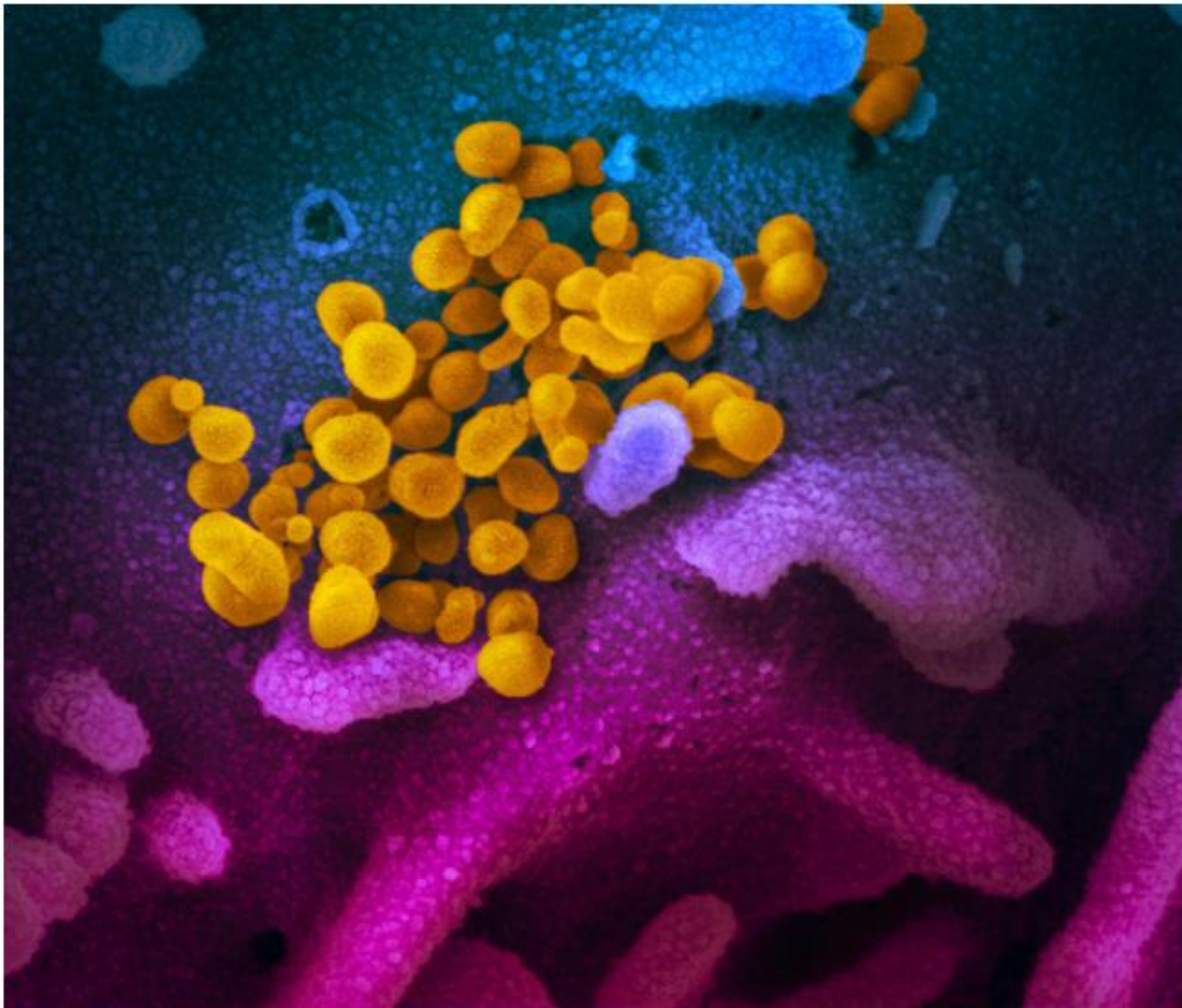


Third Covid-19 antibody treatment in Singapore in the works; human trials likely in coming months

By TESSA OH



NIAID-RML via Reuters
A scanning electron microscope image of the novel coronavirus (yellow) emerging from the surface of cells cultured in the lab.

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SINGAPORE — A group of local scientists have discovered five antibodies that can potentially be developed into an antibody treatment for Covid-19 patients to prevent further infection.

In a press statement on Wednesday (June 17), the DSO National Laboratories (DSO), which led the research efforts, said human trials for the lead antibody — known as AOD01 — will commence in the upcoming months, pending approval from the Health Sciences Authority (HSA).

Should the trials be successful, the antibody therapeutic treatment could potentially help to prevent Covid-19 patients from becoming seriously ill, as it will block the virus from spreading in the body.

Dr Conrad Chan, the principal research scientist and laboratory director for applied molecular technology at DSO, said: “If the clinical trial goes well and everything works as we hope, how the antibody (treatment) would work is that when injected into a person, it will circulate throughout the whole body.

“If we do that before the illness becomes severe... we can prevent the virus from infecting the lungs, where the real damage occurs.”

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He added that Covid-19 first infects the upper respiratory tract, in the nose and in the throat. The infection becomes severe when the virus spreads to the lungs.

This is the third such antibody treatment backed by the Government in the works here.



The DSO team working on the development of the Covid-19 antibody: Photo: Mindef

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A team at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*Star) is currently in the early stages of research for a similar antibody treatment while another local biotech firm Tychan **began human clinical trials** for its antibody treatment this week.

These are part of a whole-of-Government effort involving agencies such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Health and the Economic Development Board, which have brought together research institutes and biomedical companies to quickly advance the research towards clinical trials.

In the statement, DSO said that since March, its team of researchers have screened thousands of B cells — the cells that produce the antibodies — and isolated its first two antibodies within a month of receiving the blood samples from the National Centre for Infectious Diseases and the Singapore General Hospital.

These antibodies were taken from the blood samples of recovered Covid-19 patients as research has shown that this method assures a high degree of patient safety and efficacy.

The team of scientists was able to achieve this by harnessing DSO's proprietary screening technique, which was developed in collaboration with the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Life Sciences Institute over the past five years.

DSO added that the method reduces both the time and manpower usually required for typical cell-screening methods.

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