

As COVID pandemic drags on, focus turns to quest for universal coronavirus vaccine

Could a so-called “pan-coronavirus” vaccine be the long-awaited silver bullet that ends the COVID pandemic—and the next one, too?

Answer: It’s complicated.

“The term pan-coronavirus vaccine needs an asterisk next to it,” [Dr. Stuart Ray](#), vice chair of medicine for data integrity and analytics at Johns Hopkins’ Department of Medicine, told *Fortune*.

Such a vaccine could tackle all [coronaviruses](#), named for their crown-like appearance under a microscope. Or it could focus on COVID-19 and its myriad variants. Or it could tackle the [four longstanding coronaviruses](#) that circulate as common colds—or any combination thereof.

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Whatever form such a vaccine might take, it’s a worthy goal, Dr. Bruce Walker—director of the Ragon Institute of MGH, MIT, and Harvard, a medical institute focused on eradicating disease, and co-leader of the Massachusetts Consortium on Pathogen Readiness—told *Fortune*.

But it may forever remain just that: a goal.

“I think we have to be aspirational in terms of aiming to make a pan-coronavirus vaccine, but it will not be an easy task,” Walker cautioned. “There’s not an obvious path forward.”

However pie-in-the-sky the goal may be, there’s no shortage of work being done to accomplish it. A universal coronavirus vaccine is a top research priority for nonprofits, government agencies, and vaccine-makers, according to an [April article](#) in *Nature*.

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