

Under the Microscope

With Professor Simon Mallal

World AIDS Day on December 1 was an appropriate setting for Royal Perth Hospital and Murdoch University researcher Professor Simon Mallal to announce two new HIV-AIDS research collaborations.

Prof Mallal believes one of these, a \$300 million project with other world leading researchers, can go part of the way to developing a vaccine against HIV.

The second project for Prof Mallal's group involves a grant of \$930,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and is part of an international European collaboration to develop a HIV vaccine using pox-virus carrier proteins.

"The world's best chance of reversing and ultimately halting the HIV epidemic is to find a vaccine – our team in Perth is playing a key role in this effort," Prof Mallal said.

"We are designing vaccines tailored to the genetics of the people and the virus which vary from nationality to nationality and country to country."

He said his ultimate hope was to have a fully effective HIV vaccine.

"We hope to be able to eliminate the problem, as we did with smallpox," he said.

"This is a much greater threat because of the organism's ability to mutate, but we have been able to overcome other big medical challenges and I don't see why this one can't be conquered," he said.

Prof Mallal said 956 new diagnoses of HIV were made in Australia last year and 2.9 million people around the world died of AIDS. The global AIDS toll is more than 25 million.