

# Novartis - a pharmaceutical giant

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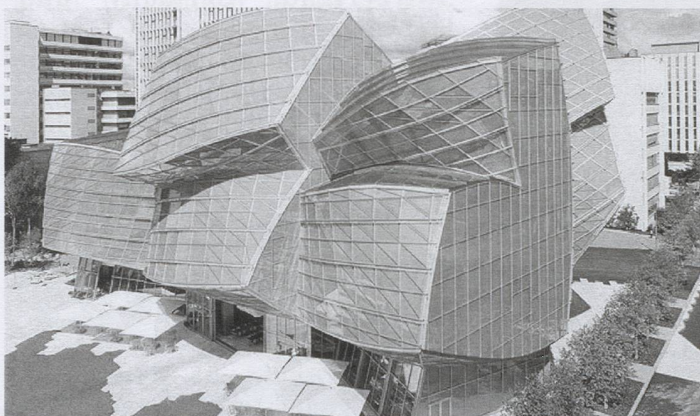
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# Novartis – a pharmaceutical giant

Novartis International AG is a multinational pharmaceutical company based in Basel. Novartis manufactures, amongst many, many other drugs, Voltaren and Ritalin.

In addition to internal research and development activities Novartis is also involved in publicly funded collaborative research projects, with other industrial and academic partners.

Novartis was created in 1996 from the merger of Ciba-Geigy and Sandoz Laboratories, both Swiss companies with long histories. Ciba-Geigy was formed in 1970 by the merger of J. R. Geigy Ltd



Novartis head office

(founded in Basel in 1758) and CIBA (founded in Basel in 1859). Combining the histories of the merger partners, the company's effective history spans 250 years.

In 1939, Geigy chemist Paul Hermann Müller discovered that DDT was effective against malaria-bearing insects. He received the 1948 Nobel Prize in Medicine for this work.

Sandoz was founded in 1886. The company began producing the fever-reducing drug antipyrin in 1895 and the sugar substitute saccharin in 1899. In 1939, Sandoz began producing agricultural chemicals.

The psychedelic effects of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) were discovered at the Sandoz laboratories in 1943 by Arthur Stoll and Albert Hofmann. Sandoz began clinical trials and marketed the substance from 1947 through to the mid 1960s under the name Delysid as a psychiatric drug. Research on LSD peaked in the 1950s and early 1960s. Sandoz withdrew the drug from the market in the mid-1960s. "Sandoz" continues to be used as a Novartis generic drug brand.

Novartis combined its agricultural division with that of AstraZeneca to create Syngenta in November 2000.

In 2006, Novartis acquired the California-based Chiron Corporation. Chiron Vaccines and Chiron Blood Testing now are combined to form Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics.

In 2009, Novartis reached an agreement to acquire an 85% stake in the Chinese vaccines company Zhejiang Tianyuan Bio-Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd. as part of a strategic initiative to expand the group's limited presence in China.

In 2010, Novartis offered to pay US \$39.3 billion to fully acquire Alcon, the world's largest eye-care company.

In January 2009 the United States Department of Health and Human Services awarded Novartis a \$486 million contract for the construction of the first U.S. plant to produce cell-based influenza vaccine. The stated goal of this program is the capability of producing 150,000,000 doses of pandemic vaccine within six months of declaring a flu pandemic.

The major bases for R&D are Basel, Shanghai, and Boston. Operations in China are set for rapid expansion within the next 5 years. Novartis has almost one hundred thousand employees worldwide.

## Patented medicine versus generic drugs

In 2006, Novartis launched a court case against India seeking to prohibit the country from developing generic drugs based on patented medicines. Novartis challenged a law that allows India to refuse to recognize a patent for an existing medicine if there is a modified formula resulting in a re-patent of the drug. In 2007 an Indian court ruled against Novartis saying that, "Novartis' legal challenge ... was a threat to people suffering from cancer, HIV and AIDS, diabetes and other diseases who are too poor to pay for them." The high court also claimed to have no jurisdiction on whether Indian Patent law complied with WTO patent guidelines.

In the months leading up to the hearing, more than half a million people wrote to the CEO of Novartis expressing their opposition to the suit. Novartis has decided not to appeal the ruling.

## Sandoz chemical spill - and a conspiracy theory

On November 1, 1986, a fire and its subsequent extinguishing at a Sandoz agrochemical storehouse caused a major environmental disaster, which released toxic agrochemicals into the air and resulted in tons of pollutants entering the Rhine river, turning it red. The chemicals caused a massive mortality of wildlife downstream, killing among other things a large proportion of the European eel population in the Rhine. The cause of the blaze was never established.

In 2000 a former senior U.S. intelligence official stated that the Soviet KGB had ordered the East German Stasi to sabotage the chemical factory. According to him, the operation's objective was to distract attention from the Chernobyl disaster six months earlier in Ukraine. The Swiss authorities were considering to open investigations again. *internet*