

COVID-19 Lessons and Solutions to Create a Healthier, Safer and more Equitable World

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Abstract

Since the world's response to COVID-19 began, we have all worked to outrun a virus that has so far proven faster than we have been. Industry, governments, hospitals, providers, suppliers, researchers indeed entire countries found themselves on their heels for much of 2020. The significant efforts and associated learnings accumulated since early 2020 enable meaningful early insights to inform the current crisis and the future course. Swift pathogen surveillance and sharing, an enabling innovation ecosystem built on strong intellectual property protections, global voluntary partnerships supporting an unprecedented manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, are part of the lessons learned. It is also clear however that collective efforts are needed to achieve health equity, while ensuring health systems and delivery infrastructure are strengthened. The biopharmaceutical industry, having played a critical role in the response against COVID-19, is committed to working with stakeholders and is contributing game changing solutions to equitable access to ensure vulnerable populations are prioritized.

Keywords:

Would we have done better if all vaccine or drug development had been done on a non-profit basis? I very much doubt it. Would there have been more COVID-19 vaccines or treatments faster without the intellectual property protection? Certainly not.

While we must urgently address the bottlenecks that resulted in vaccine inequity, it is indisputable that we all need to do more and go further. This includes how to achieve more equitable allocation faster in the future, with more geographic dispersion of manufacturing capacity as an important component of that. It is with this in mind that biotech firms, vaccine manufacturers in developing countries, and innovative pharmaceutical companies, have united behind a proposal offering a practical solution for better access to vaccines for future pandemics. They have agreed to jointly endorse the Berlin Declaration framework which outlines how the industry would reserve an allocation of real-time production of vaccines for distribution to priority populations in lower-income countries for future global pandemics.

Conclusion

The vaccine innovators and manufacturers also outline their support for collaborations, a geographically diverse sustainable manufacturing footprint and mechanisms for rapidly scaling-up supply in a future pandemic. They agree to build on existing manufacturing partnerships, business-to-business agreements set up in advance, ongoing capability development and voluntary licensing and voluntary technology transfer where this will facilitate rather than impede scale up and global supply. These efforts rely on having a strong innovation ecosystem and the removal of regulatory and trade barriers to export. For the proposal to succeed, the health systems in lower-income countries need to be better prepared to absorb and deliver vaccines and treatments, and high-income countries need to provide the necessary

political and financial support. The solution proposed has the potential, if the G7 and G20 embrace it, to become a new social contract that would ensure equitable access in future pandemics.

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