



AS IT IS

WHO Criticizes 'Vaccine Nationalism' in Call for Worldwide Agreement

August 18, 2020

Nations that store possible COVID-19 vaccines while not sharing them with others will deepen the **pandemic**, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday.

The WHO's chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, appealed to countries to join an international agreement on vaccines.

The WHO has urged wealthier nations to join its "COVAX **Global** Vaccines Facility" for sharing possible vaccines with developing nations. Tedros said he sent a letter to the WHO's 194 member states, telling them to sign up for the program by August 31.

Tedros' push for COVAX comes as the European Union, Britain, Switzerland and the United States are making deals with companies testing possible vaccines. Russia and China are also working on vaccines. The WHO fears national interests could hurt international efforts to slow the spread of the virus.

"We need to prevent vaccine nationalism," Tedros said during an online meeting. He added that sharing limited vaccine supplies is "in each country's national interest."

The European Commission (EC) has urged European Union member countries to avoid the WHO-led call for joining COVAX. The EC is worried about its cost and speed.

More than 21.9 million people have been reported to be infected with the novel coronavirus worldwide and 772,647 have died. Those numbers come from Reuters news agency.

To date, 92 poorer countries hoping for voluntary donations have expressed an interest in COVAX. Eighty wealthier nations have also shown an interest. The numbers have not changed much from a month ago.

The WHO hopes to get wealthier countries to join and finance the agreement.

Some countries will not join until the agreement's terms are set, noted Bruce Aylward. He leads the WHO's ACT **Accelerator** initiative. The program was set up to speed supplies of COVID-19 **diagnostics**, drugs, and vaccines to those needed.

"We are not **twisting** arms for people to join," he said.

Increasing odds

There are more than 150 vaccines in development, over 20 in human studies and several in **late-stage** drug trials. The WHO said that even countries making one-on-one deals with other countries increase their chances of getting the vaccine by joining COVAX.

"Which one will be the candidate that will be successful, we don't know yet," said WHO's Mariangela Simao. She added that any country that joins COVAX is "actually betting on a larger number of vaccine candidates."

COVAX now covers nine vaccine candidates.

The WHO said Tuesday that it remains worried that infections among younger people are rising worldwide. It said many younger men and women do not know they are carrying the coronavirus. They could endanger the sick and older adults, the health agency said.

"The **epidemic** is changing," said WHO's Western Pacific regional director, Takeshi Kasai. "People in their 20s, 30s and 40s are increasingly driving the spread."

I'm Susan Shand.

The Reuters News Agency reported this story. Susan Shand adapted it for Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

Words in This Story

pandemic - *n.* a contagious illness that crosses national boundaries

global - *adj.* **worldwide**

accelerator - *n.* an item or system that speeds things up

diagnostic - *adj.* a way of examining an illness to figure out what it is

twist - *v.* to pull out of shape

late-stage - *adj.* at the end of its process

epidemic - *n.* a contagious illness that is not controlled
